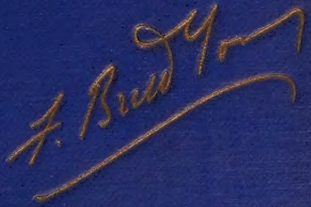

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with all good wishes from F.W.C.
Xmas 1930

The author is a friend and
neighbour of ours, and is in
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THE RED KNIGHT

A ROMANCE

FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

'You will observe the Rules of Battle, of course?' the White Knight remarked, putting on his helmet too.
'I always do,' said the Red Knight.
THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS

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To
WILLIAM ARMSTRONG

My Dear B,

This book must be yours, partly because I hope that you will some day produce the play which lies hidden in it, and partly to remind you of that other unacted masterpiece which we composed to an accompaniment of maxim-fire in the strange summer of 1918.

Yours,
F. B. Y.

Johannesburg, *March*, 1921.

The First Chapter

AN INHERITANCE

I

When people who knew Robert Bryden in his Chelsea days as a quiet, unexpansive creature of slow reactions and an indifferent painter, heard of his adventure in Trinacria they found it difficult to believe that his nature was capable of such an extravagant flight; and in this one can hardly blame them, for the Bryden that they knew had adopted a kind of protective colouring for his enthusiasms that was so typically British as to conceal them altogether, and I don't suppose that one of his friends had any idea of his parentage, apart from a vague notion that he was connected in some way (as he was) with the firm of James Bryden & Son, the wine merchants, in Aldgate.

Even so, the judgment of Chelsea may be considered lacking in imagination. It is a common failing among people who follow an imaginative profession—for conventional surroundings are often found to be best fitted to the fostering of an adventurous spirit, and if heredity have any say in these matters, it would seem that Bryden had been specially bred for the fulfilment of his own peculiar destiny, and that providence, by hard-pruning his inherited tendencies, had only contributed to the violence of their final inflorescence.

The circumstances of Robert's birth were romantic enough in all conscience. John Bryden, his father and a junior partner, in the third generation, of the wine business, was to all appearances the typical Englishman of the continental cartoon. The firm, as every one in the city knows, is one that deals exclusively in 'dessert' wines, maintaining cellars and even vineyards in Spain, in Italy, and in Trinacria. It had always been a tradition

that while the senior partners lived comfortably in Hampstead, tasting their admirable port, sherry, and marsala in leather-backed chairs, the junior member of the firm spent the greater part of the year in visiting the barbarous countries from which these products came.

In the middle of the last century it so happened that John Bryden, then a sombre and serious young man, was buying wines in Trinacria, speaking the ridiculous travesty of the language, of which he was inordinately proud, at the precise period when the national aspirations of that country were being stimulated by the invasion of a force of patriot volunteers. From the roof of his warehouse at Magazzolo, where he had run up the British flag, John Bryden saw the expedition of the Liberator land. All day he stood on that grilling roof in a black top-hat as though he expected the Union Jack to protect him from sunstroke as well as shells, watching boatload after boatload of the legionaries scramble on to the mole under a languid fire from the enemy ships outside. He saw their youth, their enthusiasm, and the damnable muskets with which they were provided; and when he came down in the evening to his mutton-chop and bottled beer—he had a tradesman's contempt for the wines in which his firm dealt—he had made up his mind. His native staff considered him touched by the sun; but in point of fact he had been singed by nothing less serious than a conversion.

Being a Victorian he had been born with a social conscience which the mere mention of the word Liberty pricked. Beneath the black frock-coat that he wore tightly buttoned over his chest, his heart was in flames. That very night he sent a wire to the firm, announcing his departure on a 'shooting trip,' selected a modern rifle from the armoury, with which the warehouse was protected, paid for it conscientiously, in case he or it should be lost, with a cheque on Coutts's Bank, and reported himself in the uniform of an English merchant to the Liberator's headquarters. Of course he was readily accepted: in the early days of the five-hundred every man counted, and a modern rifle was worth six

men. A few hours later, sweating over the hills from Magazzolo, he saw the last of the British flag drooping in the heat of a Trinacrian noon from the roof of the *Baglio Bryden.*

From this time onward little is known of his adventures. Slightly wounded in the first engagement at Roccamena, he entered Pergusa with the army of liberation and, having proved himself cool-headed and reliable, was posted to the command of a picket on one of the spurs of mountain that command the basin in which the capital lies. It was a post of some importance, for it commanded one of the principal roads approaching the city from the south, and there, long after the bulk of the army had moved eastward, he stayed with no neighbour, not so much as a single shepherd, but the Duke of Leonforte, whose castle with its drooping terraces and gardens of cypress clung to the mountain wall above him.

It was an idle and an unpleasant life; but Bryden's sense of duty was satisfied. The shelter of brush-wood that he built for himself and his companions, overlooked one of the most lovely prospects in Europe (or the world): a forest of olives sweeping downward mile on mile to meet the bright watery green of lemon-orchards, and beyond these the gleaming crescent of Pergusa itself, strewn like white shingle along its bay. Perhaps it was most beautiful at night when darkness obliterated distances, and the city glowed beneath their bivouac like a starry nebula or a mist of fire-flies. Then one of his picket, who was Trinacrian born, would sit by himself, gloating over the fiery symbol and singing old songs in praise of Pergusa. His voice was nasal, his dialect unintelligible, and the tune complicated with wavering glissandos bequeathed to his fathers by the Barbary Corsairs, and John Bryden, who could hear nothing but the voice of his gnawing hunger, who hated sentiment on principle, and didn't give a damn for any emotion but love of Liberty in the abstract, could have shot him as he sang. So he used to leave his picket to it, and walk off in his ridiculous clothes towards the terraces below the Leonfortes' castle, chewing bitter sprouts of myrtle to cool his

mouth, and dreaming of a certain chop-house in Fenchurch Street where one drank Burton ale in tankards. Seven days of inactivity and half-starvation made him so deadly sick of the finest view in Europe (or the world), that he hoped he would never set eyes on it again; but at the end of the week, still finding little food for the body, he found plenty for the soul, exchanging this grosser hunger for that of an ideal love. Providentially the Liberator had planned his landing at Magazzolo for the month of May.

He met her in the evening sitting on the lowest of the castle terraces, as entranced by the prospect of Pergusa as Bryden's vocal friend. She was frightened to see him, for he carried his rifle slung over his shoulders, and her father, the Duke, a polished but decrepit old nobleman who cared for nothing but the rents of his properties in the south, had shut himself up in the castle as soon as the news of the invasion reached him, poised carefully on his mountain-ridge until he should see how things were going and decide on which side it would be better to hop down. For this reason Bianca, his youngest daughter, had been strictly forbidden to move outside the house until a column of dust issuing from the gates of Pergusa showed her father that the army had marched away. At the moment of Bryden's meeting with her the danger was said to be past.

Physically she showed not the least trace of her family's Norman origin. She was tall and slight with an oval face, a straight nose, and wonderful eyes. Heaven knows why they had christened her Bianca, for her hair was black, and her whiteness a whiteness of ivory. Greek or Saracen if you will, or better, that amazing blend of the two which you may still find in the Trinacrian highlands. Bryden thought her eighteen at least, but in fact she had not yet passed her fifteenth year. The sight of her took his breath away. He bowed stiffly; raised his top-hat, and addressed her in Trinacrian. Being a child, she laughed at his uncouth speech, but the politeness of his address convinced her that she had no need for fear, and curiosity took its place. He told her that he was starving. She

gathered that he wished to apologise for mentioning such an unpleasant subject; but quickly realising that he spoke the truth, she had no other thought than to help him. This was not an easy matter, for her father would not have dared to commit himself to anything so definite politically as feeding a member of the invading army; but Trinacrian women mature at an early age, and by dangerous scheming she managed to feed Bryden after a fashion during all the rest of his three weeks' stay upon the mountain. He shared her food conscientiously with his companions, and naturally, considering the season of the year and Bianca's extraordinary beauty, he fell in love with her, though he never would have permitted himself the liberty of telling her so without first consulting her parents.

If there ever had been any chance of a declaration, it quickly vanished when, in the course of the second week, she told him her age. This came as a great shock to him. Judging the affair by English standards, he felt as if he had already committed an indecency punishable by law. His behaviour became more frigidly, ridiculously formal than ever, and Bianca began to wonder what she had done to offend him. For a time it had seemed to her as though they might be friends. At the end of the third week, his picket received orders to move on eastward in the rear of the victorious army, and she was almost relieved. On the last evening he bade her a decorous good-bye.

'I do not suppose that I shall ever see you again,' she said.

'On the contrary,' he replied, in his best business manner. 'At a later date, I shall esteem it my duty to thank your father in person for the provisions that you have so kindly . . . provided.'

This frightened her. She implored him to do nothing of the kind, and he, slowly realising that her standards of honour and his were different, and making allowances for the important fact that she was a foreigner, let his heart get the better of his conscience, promising her that when he did meet the Duke, as he assuredly would 'at a later date,' the question of the provisions that she had provided should not be raised. She thanked

him. He said 'Not at all' and kissed her hand. To her the gesture may have seemed conventional; but John Bryden was not in the habit of kissing the hands of women.

2

No doubt she missed him, for her life at Leonforte was not exciting, and her father's pompous affectation of a signorial life prevented her from enjoying the pleasures natural to her age. Bryden marched eastward over the central plateau with his small command. It was a pleasant journey, for by this time the population had decided that they did not mind being liberated, provided they were not asked to fight, and the legionaries were made welcome wherever they halted. Their line of march ran sufficiently high to avoid the heat that was already bleaching the coastal towns. They moved at a rate of fifteen miles a day through an undulating upland sown broadcast with wheat, league after league of it rustling softly in a cool breeze and not a cloud in the sky, and all the time Bryden was arranging the exact manner in which he would return to Leonforte and marry Bianca. He wasn't in any hurry; the movements of his mind, like those of his body, were awkward and deliberate. After much thought he decided that she would be ready in ten years, by which time she would have reached the age of twenty-five and he would be forty. He didn't believe in early marriages. Indeed, all his opinions on questions of this kind were already cut and thoroughly dried.

So, having settled the matter in his own mind, he corked up his emotions and put them down to mature, noting in his cellar-book that this particular *cuvée* would be at its best in the spring of eighteen-seventy. It never seems to have occurred to him that Bianca might get married in the meantime: no doubt he counted on the remoteness of her mountain tower, and, knowing something of the decayed Trinacrian nobility, guessed that the easiest way of reaching his Danæ was by a shower of gold, a blessing that was

never likely to descend on Leonforte from any other direction.

In ten years, and a little over (for in the meantime he had conceived it his duty to be besieged in Paris) he returned, riding up the hill from Pergusa, on a donkey, in a dress of ceremony. The Duke did not hesitate to receive him, for the war of liberation had affected his revenues unpleasantly, and the name of Bryden stood in that impoverished country for a symbol of wealth. Indeed John had paved the way for his coming by arranging large purchases of wine from the old man's southern estates. The proposal of marriage rather took old Leonforte off his feet, but though he demanded a pedigree, Bryden knew that what he really wanted was a letter of credit which was far easier to supply. When Bryden suggested to him that Bianca herself might be consulted, her father was staggered by the foreigner's ignorance of civilised convention and waved the question aside; but Bryden, who knew by this time that the game was won, insisted, and Bianca was called in to see her suitor. They met as strangers, for he held to the promise that he had given her, and for this she was fluttered and thankful.

Ten years had made little difference in John Bryden's appearance, and she recognised him at once, for he was the only Englishman (like the pictures) that she had ever seen. The Duke, with easy tears in his eyes, told her of the proposal and authorised an acceptance, which she never hesitated to give. In this her father saw nothing but a respect proper to her sex and his own magnificence; but Bryden knew better—he knew, he had always known, that she had been his from the day of their first meeting, and indeed this curious man with his overwhelming self-confidence, his slow-burning, intense enthusiasms and his genuinely distinguished presence, must have made an attractive figure.

So they were married with what seemed to her father a magnificent settlement, and a ten years' contract for all the Leonforte wine that assured the old gentleman his winter season in Pergusa; and as far as one knows they lived happily together, for Bryden's devotion was as constant to his wife as to his democratic principles.

These indeed were her only embarrassment, but as years went on she realised that the least mention of an oppressed and aspiring minority, was sufficient to turn her husband from a staid business man into a soldier of fortune. By this time he had taken his place in the management of the London house, working capably and shrewdly in the intervals between his wild-goose flights in the cap of liberty. They lived in a sombre house in Bloomsbury that seemed to have closed its doors on romance for a good two hundred years, but Bianca was never astonished to see her husband sitting silent all through breakfast, dazed by the buzzing of bees in some new Phrygian bonnet, and then to hear him say casually, 'My love, I am going to Armenia to-morrow,' or, 'My dear, I must sail for Schleswig-Holstein to-night,' announcements which he always followed by minute instructions as to the solicitor's office in which his will was kept, and warnings as to the necessity of locking up the silver at night.

These adventures of his meant periods of great loneliness for her. In the first ten years of their married life they had no children, and her only friend in the misty loneliness of London was a Trinacrian peasant woman, named Concetta, whom John Bryden had thoughtfully imported shortly after their wedding. Little by little Bianca began to realise that her husband always returned refreshed and rejuvenated from these war-like excursions. They were the only form of dissipation in which he indulged, and when, in the lull that followed the Franco-Prussian War, it really seemed as if oppression had vanished from the face of Europe, and he was forced to settle down to the routine of Aldgate, he appeared to lose his spirits, and caused her actual anxiety. The defeat of Gladstone's Home Rule Bill raised them again and relieved her. He decided, abruptly, that England was no longer a free country, sold his interest in the business and his lease of the Bloomsbury house, and emigrated to America.

Three years before this happened, their first and only child, Robert, had been born. The strain of this event increased by the strangeness of their new circumstances told heavily on Mrs Bryden. For the first time

since their marriage she confessed her homesickness, and when, a few years later her father, the old Duke, died, she begged her husband almost hysterically to let her visit Trinacria, promising that this should be for the last time.

Once more the whole family crossed the sea to Europe, and Robert, then a child of six was taken by his mother, herself a child again, to visit Leonforte while his father, whose taste for romantic discomfort was confined to one variety, stayed behind in Magazzolo with his old business friends. The castle, which, with the old Duke's death had passed to a collateral branch of the Leonforte family, was empty. There the cholera, which in that year ravaged Trinacria, caught them. John Bryden, hearing that his wife was ill, hurried up to Leonforte to nurse her, too late to see her alive but in time to take the infection himself. Five days later he too died, and Robert, carried down to Magazzolo in the arms of Concetta, was deposited, like a parcel of left luggage, in the Bryden warehouse, and shipped to his uncle in London with the next consignment of wine, too young to realise his loss and only heart-broken because his nurse could not go with him.

From that moment he became an object of charity, for though John Bryden had not so far forgotten himself in the agonies of his illness as to neglect informing his relatives where his will might be found, an examination of this document showed them that the bulk of his estate had long since gone to the subsidising of forlorn hopes, and that very little was left.

3

The story of Robert Bryden's childhood in his uncle's house at Hampstead, of his schooling, and of his revolt against a life-sentence of imprisonment in an office has been written, in its essentials, a dozen times already. On the whole Robert rubbed through pretty well. He was never sensitive nor brilliant enough to have made the hero of a chronicle novel, and if he had not developed

a deplorable inclination toward the plastic arts, he might have remained a member of the Hampstead family circle indefinitely. His uncle Walter was genuinely anxious to do his duty by the orphan: a quiet little man with a tender heart and an emollient manner. Robert's aunt was the only fly in the ointment, and she, poor woman, did no more than obey the instincts of a natural, if tigerish maternity when she made it a rule to consider her own children first. Happily by the time he was fifteen, it became clear that Robert was not likely to wipe the eyes of either of his cousins, and his aunt, realising this, began to lay out plans for a humble future, suited to what he was likely to achieve. Considering his income, she decided it would scarcely be fair to send him with her own sons to a university, where he might learn expensive habits, and her husband, who always did what he was told, contrived to find him a place in the Aldgate office. It was part of his aunt's settled policy to keep the child in ignorance of his aristocratic birth. 'It will only put ideas into his head,' she said, 'and I'm sure that poor John, with his liberal principles, would have approved.'

Robert hated his work, principally because he was inefficient and knew it, but in all probability it did him no harm. His nature was already too firmly fixed to be much affected by an office routine. From the beginning the two hereditary strains that afterwards determined his destiny declared themselves. The first, his romantic love and idealisation of his mother's country, born of the vaguest memories and influences that were not remembered, was encouraged in a hundred ways by the firm's dealings with their house at Magazzolo. The shelves of the office in which he worked were ornamented with the earthen amphoræ in which Brydens had first imported their Trinacrian wine. Their lovely shapes hypnotised him and often set him dreaming at his desk, his mind eddying between a shadowy reconstruction of his own early childhood, and the nascent desire to imagine and to create forms as beautiful. Nearly every day brought him business letters from Trinacria. They were typed on an old-fashioned paper, headed by a woodcut of Brydens' *baglio* and the mountains behind

it, and sometimes they were written in the language that he had learnt as a child. The words came back to him with a miraculous easiness. He seemed to understand things that he had never known, and this enthralled him. More than once he begged his uncle to send him to Magazzolo on business, but Walter Bryden always evaded these requests. He felt, conscientiously, that since he couldn't rid his nephew of the regrettable infusion of Southern blood that his mother had given him, the very least he could do was to isolate him from foreign influence. He flattered himself that so far nobody would suspect Robert of being anything but a true-born Englishman, and he was right.

Physically the boy resembled his mother in everything but John Bryden's bodily strength. Robert's eyes were gray, his hair of a warm brown, and his skin unpigmented. He even inherited certain mannerisms of gesture and speech that old employees of the firm smiled to remember. Indeed, if John Bryden had bequeathed nothing but physical characteristics to his son, things might have gone more smoothly. Unfortunately, he had also transmitted to him the social conscience, the passion for lost causes that had made him such an inconvenient member of the firm. This fatal piece of atavism first declared itself one day when Robert, a boy of sixteen, stalked coolly into his uncle's office and demanded that he should be allowed to sail for South Africa, not, as Walter had fondly imagined, as a member of the City Imperial Volunteers, but as a supporter of the Boer Republics. His uncle's feelings were so shocked that he could not even answer him. In any case he knew that he would have to consult his wife before he committed himself. He went straight back to Hampstead and told her.

'I could see poor John all over again in every particular,' he said. 'Upon my word it was positively ridiculous!'

'Ridiculous? Of course it was!' Mrs Bryden interrupted, and he knew better than to explain that she had missed his meaning. 'What a mercy,' she added fervently, 'that he isn't our own child! Though I must say, Walter, that if he *had* been, you, at any rate,

could not have treated him more considerately. I dread to think of that boy's future!'

In the evening Robert appeared before the judgment seat, and for the next month or two, particularly when the flood of war turned in favour of the British, he had a thin time of it. They laughed at him, and laughter was the last thing that his seriousness could bear. What is more, the incident had established his reputation for wrong-headedness, and this irritated him into living up to it.

His uncle's weakness allowed him to assert a mild independence. Robert made his evenings his own, and began to study art at a suburban school where he showed a certain aptitude for painting. Walter Bryden was tolerant, but his aunt supplied the grievance for which Robert was looking, ramming the virtues of his cousins down his throat as often as she got the chance.

As soon as he was twenty-one he claimed the small fortune that his uncle had rescued from the debris of John Bryden's affairs. Walter, as his wife was never tired of assuring him, had done his best with it, but his best did not amount to more than seventy pounds a year, a sum that Hampstead considered incompatible with an orderly life. Magnanimously he offered to double it if Robert would stay on with the firm—he was worth as much if only for his knowledge of Trinacrian—but Robert, in the meantime, had developed strong views on the subject of personal liberty and even stronger on that of his artistic vocation, and refused.

He went to live with a friend in Chelsea, working with devotion but without success at his art. Sometimes he sold a picture, but the dealers who bought them must have been less acute than most of their kind. The family at Hampstead rarely saw him, for his genuine poverty had by this time made him intolerant of that smug suburb. Once they were shocked to hear that he had become a member of the Fabian Society, though the news only reached them several months after he had found it much too Fabian, and drifted into the Marxian fold. Constitutionally he was what his aunt's brother, a jovial physician in Wigmore Street, called an 'antibody.' His opinions, violent though they

seemed, were only important to him because they were held by a minority, and the smaller the minority the more devoted he became.

No cause really appealed to him unless it were as good as lost. During the early years of the twentieth century he embroiled himself with Indian Nationalism, and, incidentally, Theosophy. When the European War came he enlisted at once in the cause of Belgium: fought, and was decorated at Ypres (to the intense satisfaction of his aunt, who pointed him out as an example of the spiritual regeneration wrought by war); but later, to her disgust, refused the commission which would have enabled her to add him to the gallery of officers in khaki that already decorated the top of her piano. In any case the unhappy lady had rejoiced too soon; for when the German resistance weakened, Robert began to regard himself as an aggressor, refused to obey orders, and in spite of his medals spent the rest of the war in a military prison among other victims of a perverted conscience, consoled, no doubt, by the reflection that he had been born in advance of his time. He could not have made a greater mistake. In point of fact he was developing in a modified degree the characteristics of his Victorian father.

But this is to anticipate. . . . The most important years of Robert Bryden's life were those that he spent in Chelsea, living meanly, painting bad pictures and formulating his very various political creeds. He made few friends, and when his original house-mate lost his life in a climbing accident, he kept on the studio by himself, scraping along as best he could, devoting himself doggedly to his painting. He must have had some sort of vocation to have stuck to it through so many inglorious years. Indeed the desire to paint possessed him so thoroughly, or perhaps he found it so potent an anodyne, that he gradually forgot all about his politics, and even lost, by degrees, the passion for Trinacria that had inflamed the imagination of his youth.

Little by little, as the vivid pictures of his childhood faded, he began to be ashamed, or if you like, a trifle nervous of his mixed origin. Once or twice, it is true,

he planned a painting trip to the South, but when the time came he always jibbed and switched himself off to Holland, or at the best got no farther than Paris. Perhaps he distrusted the romantic side of his nature; perhaps he dreaded a disillusionment and the dulling of his visions. When his acquaintances chaffed him, he simply told them that his funds wouldn't run to such a distant excursion, and not one of them, curiously enough, ever guessed that he was half a southerner himself, though they might have seen his eye brighten and his cheek flush when he heard a Trinacrian phrase in a restaurant. I suppose the time was not ripe for this side of his inheritance to develop. It came suddenly, violently, about two years before the war, on the day when he met Carmela.

4

Carmela—that was the only name by which she was known—was a model, a citizeness of the half-world that does not bother much about nationality. She had been working in London for three or four years before Bryden met her; and though she had been idealised often enough in the sugary subject-pictures of Glaister the Academician, whose mistress she undoubtedly was for a while, there was nothing very remarkable about her. She was, in fact, exactly the sort of type that Rupert Glaister painted and sold by the dozen, a luscious young Trinacrian brunette with a face that would have been beautiful if it had been more intelligent, and a body that might have been exquisitely graceful if it had been more alive. These qualities, as it happened, suited Glaister down to the ground, for he specialised in the more languid presentations of Southern life: young ladies lounging in Venetian gondolas: Campanian *contadine* basking like lizards under olives, and that sort of thing. All he asked of Carmela, when he was painting her, was that she should assume an attitude of repose, and this she was willing to do as long as he kept her fat with chocolates.

When Bryden first met her at a Chelsea rag, it is only fair to say that she was thinner, having quarrelled with Glaister a few months before. Bryden, who was usually very shy with women—his father had not fallen in love till he was over thirty—scarcely noticed her until the end of the evening, and then only because their host, in an excess of zeal, upset a bottle of Benedictine over a long-fringed vermilion shawl that Carmela wore draped about her body in the Spanish fashion. The poor man couldn't help it, but the accident transformed Carmela from the languid beauty of Glaister's pictures, into an incarnate sirocco, who lashed him with a string of violent cockney obscenities that she had picked up, God knows where. Everybody laughed, and this threw her into a state of mind that she couldn't express in English. Losing her last vestige of control, she burst into a spate of dialect that meant nothing to anybody in the room but Bryden. To the rest of them she sounded like nothing but a wild animal snarling; but Bryden, who knew what she was saying, saw that her passion was simply that of a child whose favourite toy has been broken by some careless elder. He came up to her and tried to soothe her in much the same way as Concetta had soothed him in his own childish tempers. The sound of her own language sobered her. She stared at him with tears in her eyes.

'Art thou also Trinacrian?' she gasped.

'Yes, yes,' he assured her, and in the surprise she almost forgot her temper.

'We others will leave those pigs,' she said. She thrust the sticky shawl into his hands, took his arm, and swept him out of the room with her.

Nothing of the kind had ever happened to Bryden before. Women, as a rule, had been rather frightened by his seriousness, and aroused an answering hostility in himself; but in this case there had been no anxious preliminaries, their complete segregation in a room full of foreigners had thrown them at once into a strange and thrilling intimacy. Carmela, who was nothing if she wasn't frank, behaved from the first as if they had known each other all their lives. She, Heaven knows, could supplement Bryden's inexperience of women by

a pretty thorough knowledge of men. She had taken a fancy to him and had cultivated the art of making herself attractive to men even when they had not taken her fancy. However awkward he might be, she had decided to take possession of him, primarily because she was tired of living by her wits; and the conquest was easy enough, for not only did her soft dialect intoxicate him with its suggestions of his early dreams, but her beauty was provocative, and when she abandoned her languid Glaister-like poses she could be sufficiently brilliant and seductive to turn a harder head than Bryden's.

They walked along the King's Road to his studio, and there, in an atmosphere of playful domesticity, they set to work to wash the spoiled shawl, not because this really mattered to her now that her burst of anger was over, but because some game of this kind seemed to her the best way of putting him at his ease. And all the time they joked in a playful dialect of diminutives that made Bryden feel as if they were two children cast up together on a desert island. She laughed when she saw the dust and disorder of his studio. With the practical sense of a peasant she turned up her sleeves and began to put things straight. She forbade him to help her, and posed deliciously before his dusty mirror, taking good care that he should see her at her best angle.

When the work was finished she sighed and came to sit beside him on the divan, and there they stayed together in the firelight talking of Trinacria, and of her own childhood in Pergusa. By this time it was getting late, and Bryden nervously suggested that he should see her home. She did not answer him, but rose slowly from her seat beside him and stood before the glass tidying her hair and putting on her hat. Bryden, fascinated, watched this leisurely process. When she was ready he opened the door for her and stood aside to let her pass. Carmela followed him slowly, then stood before him with half-closed eyes.

'Dost thou want me?' she whispered, and Bryden trembled, and she stayed.

The weeks that followed were the most enthralling

in his experience. The desire of a moment deepened into a consuming passion. It seemed to him that he had never lived before. Certainly, in all his Chelsea days, he had never known such physical comfort as Carmela gave him, and her quick, instinctive understanding of his essentially simple nature made her realise that she pleased him most when she maintained the atmosphere of childish domesticity, that had put him at his ease so quickly on the day of their first meeting. Indeed her own desires were of the simplest. All she asked of life was that she should live without anxiety for the morrow, and being used to the modest fare of the Trinacrian peasant, she found that his invested income together with the little that he earned was sufficient for their comfort. The lazy yawning manner of life that had been forced on her in her relation with the academician was not natural to her: what she loved most was to have a house of her own, to cook and to sing and to chatter, all of which Bryden found most charmingly idyllic. With her she brought her only portable furniture, an atrocious oleograph of San Constanzo, the patron saint of Pergusa, which she hung in a conspicuous place at their bedside, and to which she paid the tribute of an occasional candle. In the intervals of her household work she was always ready to pose for him, and in the rejuvenation of this experience Bryden found a new incentive to work. Never had he seemed within such an easy distance of immortality, so fertile, so full of enthusaism, so splendidly master of his art.

In this she encouraged him: 'See, I will make you famous,' she used to tell him, 'in the same way as I made Glaister famous.' And Bryden, whose feelings were naturally wounded by the mention of his predecessor's name, and would rather have died than attained the sort of fame on which Glaister flourished, was sufficiently in love with her to smile at her *gaffe*.

As a matter of fact the pictures that he painted in those halcyon months were far better than anything he ever did before, and unlike any of his scanty, later work. There was a curious ecstatic quality in their design that made them quite unsaleable; but when his dealer

asked him for more examples of his old style, and talked to him seriously about the danger of yielding to foreign influences, he only laughed and carted back the canvases to his studio. It didn't matter to him whether he sold them or not, for in the painting of them he had known a joy that could not be bought with money. Heaven knows what has happened to those pictures. Probably they were cleared in a job lot at the sale of Bryden's effects. Very few people ever saw them, for the lovers were sufficient to themselves and led a solitary life, speaking only the East Trinacrian dialect, as isolated and remote in their Chelsea garret as if they had been living in the heart of their own mountains. Their thoughts, or at any rate Bryden's, were only related to the amazing present. Carmela never spoke to him of her early life in the slums of Pergusa, or of her adventures as a model in the various capitals that she had frequented. What she had been or where she had lived mattered nothing to him, or perhaps mattered so much that he dared not risk the pain of hearing it: and she, in the same way, accepted him as she had found him. She knew that his mother had been a Trinacrian and that in his babyhood he had spoken no other tongue, and that was enough. All their former life now seemed to him blank and meaningless, void and without form. Out of this chaos their new world had been created in a flood of sweet light, and there seemed no reason to Bryden why its delights should ever end.

It was shattered, like how many other worlds, by the coming of the war. Bryden and Carmela engrossed in their idyll had not been troubled by the signs and portents that foretold this catastrophe. The life of London, with its hectic pursuit of pleasure in which other men saw the symbol of a whole civilisation spinning into the mouth of an abyss, passed them by. Living in primitive simplicity, they were unconscious of the age of iron hurrying to its iron doom.

Carmela was amazed to see how deeply Bryden felt the first news of the disaster. When he stalked into the studio at midnight with a serious face and told her that the war had come, she only smiled at him. 'And

what has that to do with us, my little one?' she said. But she could not draw him to herself, nor insulate him from the tide of emotion that was swamping the hearts of two hundred million men. 'What is it to us?' she implored him again and again, but he could not answer her. He knew that their world had been dragged down from its peaceful remoteness in the ruin of the rest. The nature that his father had given him at his birth was too strong for the theories of pacifism in which he had dabbled in his Fabian days; the violation of Belgium stung him, and he could not be happy till he had enlisted in the Artists' Rifles. Carmela, seeing that she was powerless to soothe him, left him alone with his problem. It shows how little she really knew of him that she was surprised to see him return to the studio one day in uniform, for guessing that she could not understand, he had not told her of his determination to enlist. Weeping, she implored him to be more reasonable.

'If you go from me,' she cried, 'you will never come back.'

He shook his head solemnly at all her entreaties.

'But *you* are not English,' she said. 'Why should you go and be killed for England? Why do you pretend to be patriotic when you are nothing of the kind? You are only like a sheep, following a herd that is being driven to the slaughter-house! Have you no will of your own?'

Indeed he had, as she soon found to her cost. Tenderly, but very firmly, he told her of the arrangements that he proposed to make for her comfort. All the money that he possessed should be hers; the studio, luckily, was held on a long lease; there was no reason in the world why she should not live there comfortably until his return; as a matter of prudence he thought it wiser that they should be married at once.

'Married?' she cried. 'Why do you talk to me about marriage? Do we not love each other?' She spoke as if the conditions were incompatible, and so violently that he saw that this part of his plan must be abandoned. But all the time her anger was slowly gathering. She could not be contented with anything less than a full

possession of him, body and soul, and the knowledge that he could bring himself to leave her and even talk coldly of money arrangements incensed her. Neither of them slept one moment of that stormy night. She harrowed him with every blandishment and reproach in her power, but by the morning she knew that she had lost him and hated him for it. She had tried Bryden's equable temper to the uttermost, and now, in spite of his steady determination to do his duty by her, there was war between them. They breakfasted in bitter silence. Suddenly, before he could guess what she was doing, she picked up a pointed knife from the table and would have killed herself if Bryden had not caught her. He disarmed her: held her pale and breathless in his arms. The gesture was not mere melodrama: he knew her better than that. He too was now full of a cold anger.

'What are you doing?' he said. 'Are you mad?' I'm only proposing to give you enough money to live on.'

'Don't talk to me of madness!' she panted. 'Why should I live? You and your damned money! You want me to stay on here and wait for you. You want to bribe me to be faithful to you. I'm not a child. I'm a woman and can look after myself. I've never been a kept woman yet, and I don't intend to be kept by you or any man.' She wrenched herself away from him.

For a moment his anger got the better of his tired mind.

'What about Glaister?' he said.

The taunt made her lose control of herself. In a torrent of foul language she told him that she had never cared for him, that she had only made a convenience of him when she was in a corner; that Glaister, anyway, was the better painter, and a man who knew how to treat a woman; that she had finished with Bryden for ever, and that for all she cared he might go to Hell and stay there. She swept out of the room hatless, and before he could get to the door she was half-way downstairs.

Bryden pulled himself together and set out stolidly for the park in which the recruits of his company were

learning squad-drill. All through these evolutions he was tortured by the vision of Carmela with the knife in her hand, and cursing himself for his moment's loss of temper. Now he felt that he loved her more desperately than ever. The veiled threat contained in her cry that she could look after herself, tormented him far more than her denial of love for him. That, after all their tenderness, he could not believe. At the same time he consoled himself with the reflection that it was only because they loved so violently that they had been betrayed into such a violent quarrel. He began to imagine what he would say to her in the evening's reconciliation, to count on the sweetness of a renewal of love, to think how she would lie in his arms calm and passive once more. He had tried her too hardly. It was for him to make amends.

But he knew less of Carmela than he imagined. When he returned to Chelsea that evening the studio was empty, and though he searched London for her month after month in a hungry desolation, he never once saw her again before he was drafted over to Flanders four months later.

At Ypres, still sore and bewildered, he was taught to realise the anodyne effect of warfare. He stood there in the soaked trenches, and the unceasing gunfire hammered out of his head all capacity for feeling. His brain became not callous, but numbed, insensitive alike to his private sorrow and to the calamity that had overwhelmed the world. He was, in fact, only one of the unhappy thousands whose spiritual cares the war obliterated with its insistence on the physical will to live. Never was such a paralysing poison labelled panacea; but Bryden was thankful for it, and when, in the summer of nineteen-fifteen, as a patient in a military hospital, he heard that Carmela had transferred her affections to a Pole with whom she was now supposed to be living in Paris, he was not greatly moved. Indeed, by this time he was beginning to have trouble with his conscience, partly no doubt because he was his father's son, and partly because the influence of Massa, that had worked in his numbed brain like a ferment during his service in Flanders, was about to assert itself.

5

If it had not been for Bryden's association with Carmela it is probable that he would never have met Enrico Massa. In the early days of their life together at Chelsea, those inspired months when Bryden had been painting the only pictures of his that ever mattered, he had often kept Carmela posing so late that she was too tired to think of preparing their evening meal. Bryden would not have her fatigued for the world, and so, in the best of spirits, he would propose an evening of *festa*, which meant, as a rule, a brisk walk arm in arm over the pavements eastward to Soho, and dinner in Trinacria: in other words at the Café Pergusa.

This was a small eating-house with a low, smoked ceiling lit by gas-jets ornamented with paper fringes, hidden in one of the slums on the north side of Brewer Street. To this day it remains almost unknown, for its position isolates it from the cycle of obscurity, popularity, and decadence that usually involves the restaurants of Soho. In any case the purely Trinacrian kitchen that its proprietor, old Rufo, provided was never likely to appeal to any but the most adventurous English palate, and Rufo himself could not speak a word of any language but his own. Originally a political exile, he had learned the habit of secrecy, and knew nothing of his surroundings but the vista of Leman Street, littered with foreign garbage, that he could see from his own door-step. Even his purchases in the markets were made for him by a splay-footed Italian waiter who had robbed him systematically for more than ten years.

Carmela was an old customer of the house, and though Bryden could not himself approach the nostalgic gusto with which she devoured Rufo's highly-seasoned messes, he was glad to watch her enjoying herself and to hear her chatter while he heightened the illusion of strangeness by drinking a bottle of the harsh volcanic wine that Rufo imported unmatured from Magazzolo. Thus, by degrees, he came to know most of the men

who frequented the restaurant, and among them Enrico Massa, who always occupied the same corner in the shadow of the high cash-desk.

At first sight there was little remarkable in Massa's appearance. Bryden saw nothing in him but a short man in a black coat with greasy lapels, and a black felt hat several sizes to small for him, which he wore pulled down over his eyes as though he were anxious not to be recognised. Carmela only knew him slightly and did not encourage their acquaintance. She had never liked the way in which he looked at her and denounced him, half in earnest, as the possessor of an evil eye. As a matter of fact she was always jealous of any one, male or female, in whom Bryden showed the faintest interest. In consequence of this Bryden, although subtly fascinated, never really came into contact with Massa until after Carmela had left him.

During the four months of his training, when he was billeted in a southern suburb, he used often to dine at the Café Pergusa, partly in the forlorn hope of meeting Carmela, and partly because, being a creature of habit, his steps mechanically led him in that direction. The presence of a soldier in khaki was a strange event for Rufo's customers. Even the fact that Bryden always spoke Trinacrian could not save him from feeling a general hostility or from being aware of the more particular interest that he provoked in the eyes that were hidden under Massa's hat.

At this time of day it is quite superfluous to enter into a description of Enrico Massa's face. The picture of that strange idealist is as well known as that of any general who slew his tens of thousands in the European War. Physiognomy is a dangerous science. An appeal to prejudice would soon convince the world that the forehead of Socrates was that of a criminal, and the head of Caligula that of a hero. The face of Enrico Massa was sufficiently neutral in its characteristics to be considered diabolical or saintly at will. In the Café Pergusa he appeared not greatly different from the rest of Rufo's shabby *clientèle*. Only his eyes, that were of a pale and dreamy blue, distinguished him, and these were usually hidden. It goes without saying

that no photograph ever did justice to this feature of his. Even when one spoke with the man, its effect was only gradually produced. Nor, for that matter, was his speech particularly compelling. His voice was thin and high, and his natural medium a harsh Trinacrian, full of impure vowel sounds and clipped inflections. In spite of this the mean man, sitting in the shadow of Rufo's cash-desk, exercised a peculiar influence on Bryden's spirit long before his theories had begun to possess his mind.

It was Massa himself who opened their acquaintance, and the fact of Bryden's loneliness that developed it. Massa, living in the most extreme poverty, had no room of his own in London. He slept with two other Trinacrians, waiters, in an attic in Berwick Street. Rufo's café was his only real home, and a hospitable custom allowed him to sit on at his corner table writing in his big, sprawling, almost feminine hand, long after he had finished his evening meal.

At this table, in a little while, Bryden began to join him, and the two men would sit on talking over a bottle of wine until Rufo's splay-footed waiter put up the café shutters for the night. Hour after hour the two men talked of art, of religion, of politics, of human destinies; and Bryden's interest in Massa's theories filled a little of the blank that the loss of Carmela had created.

The main characteristics of Massa's teaching, as it came to Bryden, were its freedom from violence and prejudice. One may object that history shows Massa's dictatorship to have been full of violent acts and appeals to prejudice, but the fact remains that the essence of his thought was full of sweetness and clarity, liberal and human to a degree, and it was these qualities that appealed to Bryden's heart in their early London days. We know, for example, that Massa's hatred of militarism was one of the determining factors of his life, that Bryden's uniform would have been a constant provocation to a bigot; but Massa was never bigoted unless his instinct told him that bigotry was essential to the making of the new social order as he imagined it. Always, in his

heart, he cherished a profound respect for the human conscience, and seeing that Bryden's uniform was the symbol of a fervent conviction, he never tried to shake his faith in the rightness of his conduct. No doubt it was the theories of Massa that in the course of time impelled Bryden to the line of military misconduct, that brought such shame to his family; but for the present it was the influence of the man's personality rather than his teaching that made their friendship so important, and it was with Massa's personality that European civilisation eventually had to reckon. The mere fact that in a régime of violence, starvation, bloodshed, and slavery he compelled millions of free men to bless his name, is sufficient to show that the man had in him something of the spirit that in face of contradictions has illuminated the doctrines of each great teacher of the human race.

6

But Massa's theories, after all, do not concern us. It is enough to know that Massa was a Trinacrian and a lover of liberty, and that the men were friends.

All through the war, and particularly during the loneliness of his term in prison, the memory of his friendship with Massa was working in Bryden's mind. Looking backward he knew that it had been the most intimate relation that he had ever experienced with another human being. He did not make friends easily, and though he had a hundred acquaintances with whom it was easy to exchange studio gossip or dispute insoluble problems of æsthetic into the small hours, Bryden always felt that if a sniper's bullet had knocked him out in the salient, not one of them would have been deeply moved. He could not imagine himself, a discarnate spirit, establishing a ghostly *rapport* with the souls of any of these Chelsea friends. With Carmela, of course, it was different; but even though in the two years of their life together they had abandoned themselves to the most complete physical fusion, he had always shrunk from any eager exploration of her soul, dreading

perhaps the disillusionment that he might find there. He had never been more in love with her than at the moment when she left him, or in the anguished desolation of the following months; but Flanders had changed all that, and by the time that the war was over he had become so indifferent to his loss that he could bear to speak of her without emotion, remembering nothing of their past but a few moments of poignant physical pleasure that still visited him in dreams. And, as the memory of Carmela faded, the deeper influence of Massa asserted itself: so much that when a few months after the Armistice in the west he was released from prison, his first instinct was to visit the Café Pergusa and find his friend.

He was disappointed. Massa, it seemed, had left London during the last year of the war, and Rufo did not know where he had gone. When Bryden questioned him more closely the old politician shrugged his shoulders. 'But what! How should I, a restaurant keeper, know where my clients go to? To me they are quails that pass. If they pay me it is enough. Perhaps he is in America. Perhaps in Spain. Or why not Holland? Who knows? Will the signore eat?'

Beneath these delightful manners Bryden saw a gleam of extreme caution in Rufo's eye. He hastened to reassure him.

'You should know,' he said, 'that I am not asking out of curiosity. You yourself from your cash-box must often have heard us talking. You must know that Massa and I are in political agreement.'

'Surely!' said the old man with another smile. 'But for myself I have finished with politic. If it were not for politic I should not now find myself in your magnificent city.' And he waved his hand towards the gutters of Leman Street. 'I understand that in Trinacria the food conditions are extremely bad. And the prices!' He threw up his hands.

'The truth is this,' Bryden interrupted him: 'You know where Massa is and you won't tell me. I don't believe in your ignorance for a moment.'

'You are very wise, signore,' said Rufo sympathetically. 'In these days it is difficult to believe anything.

Particularly one should not believe in appearances. Who, for example, seeing yourself in a military uniform would ever have believed that you were the friend of Massa? I will give you another instance. A few weeks ago a man came to this café whom, I confess, I found most sympathetic. He said he was Trinacrian, and by his speech and his methods of eating I concluded that he spoke the truth. Then he began to talk politic—of the Russian kind. I listened politely. It is needful to be polite to one's customers. But what if I had agreed with him? Will you believe me when I tell you that three days later I learned—I need not say how—that this man was none other than an '*agent provocateur*. Behold the times we live in!'

Bryden flushed. 'You don't suggest that I follow that trade?'

'But what! I only tell you a story. We are friends. Will you not do me the honour of eating with me to-night?'

Bryden declined the invitation abruptly.

'Consider,' Rufo urged. 'If you will eat with me to-night, who knows but that your friend Massa might return? He has not been here for six months.'

Bryden hesitated. 'You are expecting him?'

'Who knows? In these days one may not expect any one. I did not expect the pleasure of seeing you to-night. What days! What days!'

By this time Bryden knew that the only thing to be expected from old Rufo was compliments, excused himself with an equal number and left him. After a few weeks of uneasy searching he gave up all hopes of seeing Massa again, and settled down into a pale reflection of his former Chelsea life. But he was unhappy. It seemed as though the war had destroyed all his faculty for feeling pleasure, or, to be more exact, his faculty for feeling anything at all. He tried to put his studio in order for work, amazed at the callousness with which he pitched out a pathetic collection of female rubbish that Carmela had left behind her. Five years before, the least thing that reminded him of her physical presence would have thrilled him if he only touched it. He stood staring at the washing basket,

in which he had collected her things and even, for the novel luxury of feeling anything, tried to persuade himself that he still loved her; but his whole soul rebelled against the suggestion, and in the end he gave the whole lot to his charwoman. Even his portrait of Carmela in the Catanian shawl annoyed him. He threw it into a corner along with other dusty unsold canvases. He even destroyed his mistress's oleograph of San Constanzo; and the act pleased him: he felt as though he had rid himself of an irritant, and could now begin to work.

In a material sense he had never been so prosperous. His income had accumulated during the years of the war so that he had nearly five hundred pounds in the bank, and this made it easy for him to re-decorate the studio, a luxury that he had never been able to allow himself before. For a few weeks this business engrossed him, but when it was finished and he found himself gazing on a Saturday night at the transfigured room, his heart failed him. 'On Monday I shall really begin work,' he said.

But Monday came and his inclination to paint seemed further away than ever. Sometimes, in a mild flush of enthusiasm at which he grasped only too eagerly, he would put his materials in order and try to hypnotise himself into a painting mood. It was no good. 'I was more like a living man,' he thought bitterly, 'in the days when I was breaking my back in Colchester jail. I suppose that what I really want is physical exercise. It's fatal to lose a habit.'

He set off on a walking tour in the west of England, and almost in spite of himself returned from it in a state of fine physical fitness and full of hope; but as soon as the train slid into the bottom of the Thames valley his old distrust of himself returned. At Reading he was seized by a strange and sudden impulse to get out of it. He had a feeling that when he reached London some new and disturbing adventure would be awaiting him. Perhaps Carmela. No . . . he couldn't begin that all over again. And in any case he was a fool to pay attention to such shadowy premonitions. He sat back in the carriage smoking, brooding on the

results of shell-shock and the reputed effects of prison life. He could not believe that he was a broken man. Massa would have laughed at him. Massa? Was it perhaps Massa that he was going to meet? By the time he reached Paddington he had pulled himself together.

He shouldered his ruck-sac, bought an evening paper, and walked back in the twilight to his studio. When he opened the door it smelt musty and uninhabited. At anyrate he wasn't going to face the embarrassment of a new Carmela. He felt a thrill of pleasure at the beauty of the room. It encouraged him to see that he hadn't lost his taste. He thought: 'I'll have a bath and change, and stroll along to the Pergusa for dinner, just on the off chance, so that if Massa is there I shan't miss him.' Leaving the house half an hour later he remembered that he had left the evening paper in the pocket of his Harris coat. He fetched it, and as he stood at the door, with one hand on the switch of the light, he ran his eye down the headlines of the first page.

COUP D'ÉTAT IN TRINACRIA.

BLOODY FIGHTING IN PERGUSA

MASSA PROCLAIMS A COMMUNIST REPUBLIC

Bryden's heart came into his mouth. He forgot where he was going, and stood there in the doorway reading every word of Reuter's telegrams. The news was scanty and indefinite. He quickly saw that the newsboy had palmed off an early edition on him, so he hurried out into the street and caught the first bus bound for the West End. In the King's Road there was little traffic; the bus travelled at a great speed, and this sensation of swift movement together with the bright stars, the clean roadway, and the provocative smell of London filled him with excitement. The lights of the West End flashed out to greet him. At Piccadilly Circus he bought the latest editions of all

the evening papers and plunged into the Monico to read them. In the outer hall people sat stolidly talking and drinking; they scarcely noticed Bryden's excited entrance. The waiter took his order as though nothing had happened. Bryden left his drink untouched. His brain was on fire, and since Massa had taken the precaution to block every channel by which news of the revolution might reach the rest of Europe, the newspapers added very little fuel to his conflagration. Several of them even pooh-poohed the whole affair, saying that a little street fighting of the kind usual in southern Europe had been exaggerated into an alarming fiction. 'Who is Massa?' some of them asked, filling a paragraph with the confession that they did not know.

Still unsatisfied Bryden made his way to the Café Pergusa. The place was nearly empty, and Rufo received him with his usual courtesy. He had not read the paper. Who, in these days, could afford to buy papers? Bryden showed him the latest telegrams. He read them, nodding his head solemnly, and handed back the paper with a smile.

'You told me you didn't know where Massa was,' said Bryden irritably.

'Quite true. Now it appears that he is in Pergusa.'

'I suppose you know nothing of all this?'

'I am no politician. It was you who talked politic with Massa.'

Bryden threw down his papers on the table. You can keep them, you damned old humbug!' Rufo did not even blink. 'It is very possible that this will affect the price of wine,' he said slowly.

From the very first Bryden was never in doubt as to his own feelings toward the revolution. As far as patriotism meant anything to him he was a Trinacrian and had never been anything else. In these things the dreams of his childhood had shaped his soul; and if his father, fifty years before, had felt it his duty to take up arms in an earlier fight for liberty, how much more natural was it that Bryden, with his double heritage of interest, should devote himself to the Trinacrian cause. It was not for nothing that Massa

had talked to him of the reactionary government under which his countrymen suffered, and expounded his own remedies for their ills. When Bryden saw the dictator standing at last with the power to create a new order in his hands, the triple claims of creed, birth, and friendship imposed on him the duty of sharing whatever dangers or hardships might be borne.

For three months he was kept chafing in London. The first was a nightmare, for news was limited and the papers clutched eagerly at every rumour of Massa's downfall; but by the end of the third it had become clear to the rest of Europe that, whether the capitalists liked it or no, the communist republic of Trinacria was an accomplished fact, and with this the campaign of the atrocity-mongers began. The name of Massa became the obsession of the English press. The Sunday papers served up Massa's imaginary past along with their murders and divorces; his scandalous relations with women coloured the uneasy dreams of the workman's Sunday siesta; his origins were discovered and rediscovered times without number; he was a Jew, a German, a Siberian with more than a dash of cruel Tartar blood in him. He had kept a bucket-shop in Chicago, a gambling saloon in Soho, an opium den in Stepney. His bigamous wife was starving in Battersea, Philadelphia, and Lisbon at the same time. Nothing comparable to his private life in Pergusa had been heard of since the orgy of Tiberius on Capri.

At first these paragraphs incensed Bryden. He felt that he wanted to burst into the newspaper offices and tell the scoundrels who wrote them the truth about Massa as he had known him: the simple idealist whose soul was full of light and sweetness and his private life without blemish; but as the calumnies multiplied and became more ridiculous in their contradictions, he realised that the men who wrote them had no interest in Massa's morals, and that the object of their blundering violence was not Massa himself, but the political forms that he represented and that their masters dreaded.

For Massa's self he felt he could answer, but it was far more difficult to refute the circumstantial stories of communist atrocities written by honest if prejudiced

men who had escaped from Trinacria during the revolution: the tales of noble ladies stripped naked in the streets of Pergusa and driven in herds before Massa's bayonets, tales of a new Sicilian Vespers in the isolated towns of the interior where, it was said, no single member of the educated classes had escaped massacre, and of the network of paid espionage that made life in the cities intolerable and laid every man open to the malice of a private vendetta. Nothing in the history of civilisation, said the leader writers, could be compared with the horrors of the red terror in Trinacria. The revolution in Russia had been nothing to it, for the obvious reason that while the people of Russia were a dreamy, unpractical race whose excesses were merely the fruit of a visionary ecstasy, as little to be condemned as those of the characters in a Dostoevsky novel, the Trinacrian population came of a decadent Mediterranean stock that had shed its last shreds of civilisation a thousand years ago, and, having given itself over to the blood-lust of carnivorous animals, should be exterminated in the interest of humanity. It was humiliating for a Trinacrian to read this sort of nonsense, and Bryden, finding himself in a minority that dwindled day by day, became automatically more and more convinced of the rightness of Massa's cause.

The butchery of the Trinacrian Royal Family on board the ship in which Massa had promised them a safe conduct to leave the country, gave him as great a shock as it gave the rest of Europe; but his faith in Massa assured him that if the machine which he had created were moving too fast for him and growing beyond the control of a single intelligence, the dictator could not be held accountable: that Massa, in fact, was no more responsible for the Pergusan martyrdoms than Christ had been responsible for the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition. It amazed him to see the bald old bucks of the clubs, who had not turned a hair at a hundred thousand bloody casualties in the first days of the battle of the Somme, and had preached in Piccadilly the doctrine of spiritual regeneration by the ordeal of battle, should be shocked by the loss of a few hundred lives in the streets of Pergusa.

Reading column after column of 'Trinacrian Atrocities,' he remembered how Massa had once expounded to him the doctrine of Bakunin, explaining the passion of destruction as a creative passion. He did not doubt for a moment that in their process of reconstruction the sufferings of the Trinacrian people were extreme; but when the politicians of Western Europe decided to add to the horrors of his unhappy country, by blockading its coasts and starving its inhabitants, his indignation passed all normal bounds. If for a moment he had doubted it before, he now knew that his duty bound him to the side of the Trinacrian Republic, and that his place was in Pergusa at Massa's side.

This was easier said than done. When he applied in the ordinary way for a passport they only laughed at him. The British ambassador had left the country in the first weeks of the struggle, and to give a British subject a recommendation to pass 'without let or hindrance' would be merely farcical. Bryden began to pull strings among the politicians of his acquaintance, but with no better result. It is possible that the memory of his inconvenient conscience went against him. He next tried to get in touch with the Trinacrian authorities in London, but these, now isolated and relieved from the ties of any official business, were devoting themselves to the purely social side of diplomatic life, and enjoying the sympathies of fashionable London. In their opinion nobody but a madman or a rogue could ask to enter the infected area.

At last, in despair, Bryden hit on a plan that should have suggested itself to him from the first, and visited his uncle's office in the city. Walter Bryden received him nervously, with anxious glances toward the door, as if he were afraid that his wife might enter at any moment. Before his nephew was half-way through his request he had said 'No' a dozen times, and then launched into a pitiful story of the losses the firm had suffered: how the warehouse at Magazzolo had been occupied by the communist troops in the first days of the revolution, how hundreds of hogsheads of their best wine had been broached and wasted. 'In fact,' he continued, triumphantly bringing the matter home to

his visitor, 'I very much doubt if you can count on any dividends for the next two years.'

Bryden only laughed. For at the present money meant nothing to him. 'I only want you to do one thing for me,' he said,' 'and that is to back my application for a passport on business grounds. I don't mind running any risk that is to be run. What is more, I'll undertake to give you a full report of how things stand at Magazzolo. I may even be able to help you in other ways, for I happen to be acquainted with Massa, the Dictator.'

Walter Bryden went livid. 'Massa?' he cried. 'Massa? The picture of the bucket-shop, the gambling-hell and the opium den: the thought of the dictator's wife starving at that moment in Battersea, Philadelphia, and Lisbon; the vision of all the Trinacrian atrocities and of his wife's face swept into his brain at the same moment, and filled him with righteous daring.

'This is the last straw, sir, the last straw,' he spluttered. 'I am not in the habit of meeting friends of that monster. I wish you good-day.'

Bryden, too amused to be angry, walked out into Aldgate. It seemed to him that his last hope of reaching Pergusa had vanished, for he knew that by this time his importunities had probably awakened the Foreign Office to the dangerous nature of his intentions, and that he might apply to them for passports to countries bordering on Trinacria till he was blue in the face. He only hoped that he was not already being shadowed by the police.

And then, when his hopes were at their lowest ebb, a new idea struck him. He saw, in the obscurest corner of an evening paper, that the Welsh colliery owners had at last applied to the government to allow them to send a few cargoes of coal to Pergusa, and since coal, being inedible, was not calculated to allay the starvation of the Republic, and the political influence of the exporters considerable, the government had consented. Bryden saw his chance and took it.

He locked up his studio. Then, having bought fifty pounds worth of Trinacrian paper money and a revolver, he went on a walking tour in Mid-Wales, working gradually southward, and eventually arriving in Cardiff

with a fortnight's beard and all the outward appearances of a tramp. He took a bed in a doss-house in Bute Street, where he mixed with the lees of the seafaring population, biding his time, making himself acquainted with every piece of information that he could pick up in the docks. In this way he learned that a small unseaworthy tramp named the *Boston Hall* was loading coal for Pergusa and likely to sail before the end of the month, with the result that a certain Robert Blake, who presented a very remote resemblance to the Robert Bryden of Chelsea, signed on as a stoker for the round voyage at a wage of eight pounds a month, having become a duly qualified member of the Stoker's Union.

On August the eleventh, the S.S. *Boston Hall* cleared Cardiff with bunkers for Pergusa.

The Second Chapter

LANDFALL

I

In most strange adventures that fall to a man's lot there comes a moment of ecstasy, one in which he stands outside of himself and becomes aware, through some sudden tension of the senses or enlightenment of the mind, of the curious circumstances in which his body is acting. In various degrees this moment of sanity, that is almost perilous in its intensity and is supposed to be the prerogative of genius at the height of its inspiration, comes to all men. In its utter detach ment from life, its freedom from circumstance, it represents the most absolute Nirvana to which mortality can attain, being reached, in defiance of what mystics may tell us, by a complete absorption in life rather than by a withdrawal from its struggles. It is curiously arbitrary in the time of its appearance and the terms in which it presents itself. To Robert Bryden it came, sudden, transfiguring, not in the supreme moment of his Trinacrian adventure, but at a time when it had scarcely begun, and long before he had guessed how it might end. Probably because he was a painter (though never a very good one) it came to him in the terms of a picture.

He saw a cramped chamber walled and floored with iron of a matt and sooty blackness like the inside of a camera; a single electric bulb, so dimmed with a fine black powder that its filaments could be seen stretched like the aerials of a wireless apparatus, glowed with the blear light of an eclipsed sun seen through smoked glass. Behind the electric bulb a circular reflector of white enamel should have thrown a diffused beam; but this too was so coated with the black dust that

covered the walls, floor, and ceiling, and clogged the very air, that it was useless, and the four men who sweated elbow to elbow in the stokehold of the *Boston Hall* and of whom Bryden himself, in the suffering flesh, was one, were only seen as slow, heaving figures, like monsters wallowing in an equatorial swamp.

Bryden suddenly saw them, those three stokers of his watch, as he had never seen them before; and naturally the chief centre of interest was the figure next to the stifled light, himself. A mild exultation filled him at the vision of this labouring automaton with the soiled dungaree trousers. He saw the rope shoe slipping from one foot, the tendon of the great toe stretched to find a firmer stance, the large, gray vulnerable chest down which sooty rivulets of sweat were tracking from the armpits, the arms, of a blackness unrelieved but by three pale vaccination marks, the thin neck, the unshaven cheeks, white teeth, cavernous eyes. He thought, with a sudden flush of wonder: 'What the devil am I doing in this *galère*? Am I really here, and am I really such a monster? This is something like it!'

And then he found himself the victim of a discarnate chuckle. 'God, what a sight! I look like a fellow in the last stage of consumption. I'm not really in the least like that. It's this rotten light.' But while his spirit laughed, his body went on shovelling the fine coal that fell from time to time through a shute on to the heap at his side, shovelling it on mechanically to his neighbour, Jim Fisher, whose fair skin was flushed beneath the soot with blotches and wheals of red, as though he had been dragged into that dungeon from an outer torture chamber with the sweat of his agony still on him. Beyond, lost in the mirk of Jim's gigantic shadow he saw their third companion, a Welshman named Pryce, a small twisted creature with cropped gray hair and receding brows, the only obvious cave-dweller of the three. And Bryden thought: 'Good Lord, what a picture this would make': *Galley-Slaves. . . Slaves of Steam.* Yes, that sounds better. That wouldn't half make them sit up in Chelsea! *Meunier.* That's the idea, only a lot better.'

At this moment Pryce, snorting heavily, knocked

back the bolts with a clang. The furnace mouth opened; a fierce light of flame filled the stokehold, shrivelling Bryden's unpainted masterpiece; and the simmering heat, imprisoned till now behind the doors, welled outward in a wave of air that scorched his bare flanks and forced him to close his eyes with a reflex that his absent mind could not inhibit. It stung him wide awake, so that his spirit returned into his body, and his body, newly possessed by a will, began to shovel like mad, knowing that the sooner that mouth were stopped the sooner its flaming breath would be removed. They all shovelled together as if they were striving to choke the fires with fuel; but the more they shovelled the more fiercely the furnace crackled, the more hoarsely the draught roared, sucking the unconsumed smoke into the core of the furnace, till it was whirled up the smoke stack and out into the hot night, staining the sky above the waste of waters through which the *Boston Hall*, a small and ghostly tramp, plugged onward towards her landfall. Then, above the sucking of the draught, Bryden heard the voice of the third engineer, who had come forward to the stokehold and stood staring at them in a dirty Balbriggan vest, with his peaked cap stuck on the back of his head and a sweat rag round his neck.

'I can't think what you chaps are up to,' he said, 'there's not an ounce of steam in the blasted boilers. Don't you imagine I don't know what you're doing. You wait till the chief sees the revolutions!'

Neither Bryden nor Fisher spoke. Only Pryce, his eyes shining like those of some savage animal, turned round and looked at the officer. He raised his shovel. For a second it looked as if the combined stress of heat and intolerable toil would topple over his reason and turn him into a murderer. Then he thought better of it. He dropped his shovel and spat on his hands. The third-engineer had gone as softly as he came.

'Revolutions, is it?' Pryce muttered. 'Revolutions! That's what those beggars want: Revolutions! And that's what they'll get.'

Fisher broke into a boisterous laugh. All of them went on shovelling till the heap of coal was exhausted

and the heat imprisoned once more. Then Pryce staggered over to his coat and taking a bottle from the side pocket, poured the contents down a throat that was too parched to swallow. He choked. Fisher stretched his huge limbs and rubbed his eyes with the clout that hung round his neck, and Bryden squatted down on the warm deck, his hands still clasping the handle of his shovel. Now the draught snored smoothly. In the relative silence Bryden heard the plugging of the engines. It seemed to him that they were working under pressure, working against the clogged stifling heat of the night like the pump of his own thudding heart. No other sound was there but the sudden rattle of hot ashes in the fiddley, and the snorting of Pryce.

Bryden put his blistered hands to his brows and the sweat stung them to a burning tenderness. He thought 'What a damned fool I am. This is pretty unromantic when all's said and done.' In the remote clear air of the bridge, eight bells sounded, and his body thanked God for it. He was tired to death. All of them threw down their tools and stretched their backs. In the dark alley-way they jostled the men of the next watch who were coming to take their places. The short Mediterranean twilight had almost faded, and Bryden was only made aware of their nearness by seeing the lighted end of a cigarette glow suddenly in the darkness and vanish like the spark of a lighthouse on a distant coast. Then the body of the smoker rubbed up against him, and he knew by the smell of the man's clothes that it was Ah Li, a Cardiff Chinaman, who slept in the berth above him and made their cabin foul with a dropping mist of opium smoke.

The crew of the *Boston Hall* was housed in a triangular chamber running up into her fo'c'sle, its entrance flanked by the galley on one side, and, on the other, the latrine. Bryden crossed the well deck in the wake of his two companions. Through the dusk he could see the boatswain and two of the deck hands knocking away the battens from the fore-hatch. A cloud of steam issuing from the galley and hanging about the ghostly cage of a blue sparrow from Java that was the joy of the cook's life, assured him that the supply of

hot water that he had bribed him to prepare was ready. Bryden and Fisher stripped and swilled themselves on the sodden deck while Pryce, who used his ingrained coal-dust as a substitute for underclothing, rolled forward into the cabin on the left and stretched himself out in his bunk. While Bryden stood splashing himself with water, there came into his ears the sound of Fisher talking to the cook. He heard without hearing, for the memory of his sudden vision still held him, and had indeed transported him to a plane of life that was so new and strange that he would not leave it willingly.

'Be us anywhere near land, cook?' Fisher asked.

'Land? What do I know about land? All the land I care about is Roath on a Saturday night. I've no use for these here foreign places, and I've always heard there's nothing worth seeing in Pergusa. Like a lot of bloody savages; that's what these Trinacrians are. You read what the papers say about this Massa. Crippen's not in it.'

'The women's all right, I can tell you that. When I was in Pergusa three year ago I knocked up again' a little piece that'd take some beating!'

'Women,' said the cook, sourly. 'Any one can see you're young! By the time you're my age and have learned a bit of sense you'll have your bellyful of women.'

Fisher, standing up, gleaming naked, in the misty beam of the galley light, and rubbing his body with a filthy strip of Turkish towel knew better. He threw up his head and laughed out loud. 'You don't think of nothing but your belly all day, cook,' he said. And Bryden, lifting his eyes for one moment, saw the cook standing there with his pasty face, his narrow, sloping shoulders, and his unhealthy pendulous paunch, leering back at Fisher: 'There's worse things to think about all day than your belly.' He laughed obscenely and dodged the clout that Fisher threw at his head in reply. The towel hit the sparrow's cage and set the bird fluttering madly. Bryden left them. He pulled on his other pair of trousers and slipped a coat over his shoulders; then, passing out of the zone of stale opium-smoke between conflicting blasts of vegetable steam and chloride of lime, he climbed the steps of the companion

and stretched himself full length on the wooden deck of the fo'c'sle, staring into the darkness before him, searching it for the first lights of Pergusa.

There, in the silence, his strange mood of exaltation, of anticipation, of wonder, almost of dread, returned. There was not a light in all the sky but that of unutterably distant stars, not the least sense of the looming land towards which the *Boston Hall* was moving at a steady eight knots, nor any sound but the muffled thudding of the engines and the gentle swish of water from her bows. On every side endlessly the sea spread an unbroken surface, smooth and dark as a mirror backed with jet; and, in that hour, Bryden's own heart was dark like the sea, and, like the sea, a mirror in which his eyes searched, finding nothing, waiting for some revelation like a man gazing at a crystal.

A puff of warm wind moved to meet him, blowing off the unseen land. He drew it into his nostrils, and the scent of it, too delicate for conscious perception, stung his nerves to sensitiveness, so that, of a sudden, some hidden chamber of his consciousness, sealed and forgotten for thirty years and more, became suffused with light. This faint aroma of the Trinacrian mainland cleared the filmed surface of his mirror and showed him the thing for which he was searching in vain. He closed his eyes that he might see it better, and when he did so the scent grew keener in his nostrils, and the vision clearer. A faint sound thrilled in his ears. At first he thought it was no more than the singing of blood in his carotids, but as he listened it grew clearer until he knew for certain that it was the summer note of the cicalas in the hills. A day of summer; but there, under the pillared pergola of vines one could look away upward, beyond the zone of chestnuts to the limestone of the mountains with a sense of coolness and rest. He was sitting on a stone seat embellished with cool tiles in a gay Moorish pattern of blue and yellow; he could feel their shiny surface under his hands. The terrace was paved with flags of a white stone like marble on which the shadows of vine-clusters were etched with the clearness of absolute immobility; in a patch of sunlight between them a lizard lay basking as

motionless as the shadows. And below the balustrade of the pergola lay the tops of olives, scattering his foreground with their twisted trunks, merging, in the middle distance, into a soft sea of plumage, rolling away at last into a haze of blue smoke, filmy, unsubstantial, hanging on the foothills like a cloud. Suddenly he heard a sound as faint as the fall of a dry leaf, and the lizard was gone. He felt a light touch on his shoulder and turning, saw his mother smiling down at him with her oval Grecian face and her dark eyes. The sense of her love encompassed him, but Bryden was afraid of it, for he knew that she had been dead for thirty years, so long that for ages she had never invaded his dreams. She bent above him, and her cheek touched his. An absolute silence fell. Even the sawing of the cicalas ceased. The sun was setting, the mountain flushed with rose, and down below in the plain beneath the smoke of the olives he saw the lights of Pergusa strung in a crescent round the shores of its bay. It grew dark. Stars blinked through the trellis of vine. He reached for his mother's face, for he felt that he was losing her. Her lips touched his. If it were not his mother . . . if it were Carmela! A light swept into his eyes. Somebody stumbled over his legs and swore: 'What the hell do you think you're doing here?'

'It's one of the stokers, sir,' said the boatswain's voice. 'Must have fell asleep.'

'Well, hurry up and get a move on!' growled the second mate.

Bryden struggled to his feet. In front of him he saw the lights that had come into his dream: the crescent of Pergusa with horns wide-stretched to receive him, the beam of the *faro* swinging across the sky. Men were busy with the anchor gear. The *Boston Hall* stole onward through a tepid air. Bryden, still half-asleep, groped his way down the companion and tumbled into his bunk.

Lying there still half-asleep and pulling his wits together, he found it difficult to escape from the shadow of his dream. Bryden was not a superstitious man—any one acquainted with his work would have gathered that the power of vision was denied him—and he had

dreamed so rarely since the days of his childhood, that he felt inclined to take this welcoming vision seriously, to decide that it implied the sanction of whatever mystical powers were responsible for the ordering of this crooked universe. But as soon as he came to himself, recalled to full consciousness by the sweltering heat of the bunk and the rattle of the winches just above his head, his habitual scepticism returned. He heard the shrilling of a whistle, and the anchor shot thunderously down within a few feet of his ears. The roar of the chain ceased suddenly. His ears missed the throbbing of the screw, a sound to which they had become accustomed during three weeks of purgatory. The ship seemed unnaturally silent. He heard the gentle suck and plash of placid harbour-water against her sides. The first stage of his adventure was over. So far, all that had been asked of him was to labour and to sweat patiently at the orders of other men. Now it was his business to think and act for himself.

2

His first duty was to reconnoitre the land. By this time the party of the crew who had been busy with the anchor had gone aft on some other business, and Bryden's old point of vantage on the forecastle was free. From it he surveyed the smooth outer basin of the harbour in which the ship was anchored at a distance of four hundred yards from the shore. This empty space—for it seemed that the rest of the harbour was almost deserted—stretched like a chasm between him and the quays, whose lights, condensed into a narrow band and reflected from the awnings of cafés facing the street, cast a colder and altogether ghostly gleam over the tall stuccoed fronts of the houses above them and the rising city behind. Over the surface of the water sound should have travelled easily toward him; but Bryden, straining his ears, could hear nothing but a faint murmur like the note of insects in a summer noon.

Indeed, at this distance, all the swarming life of the

quays, the purposed rapid movement of hundreds of tiny figures streaming along the pavements in opposite directions reinforced the idea that he was gazing at a procession of ants, busy, inhuman creatures with whom he had nothing in common and whom he could never understand. The secrecy of their motives, their vast numbers and their buzzing activity impressed him with something like dread. He had no part or lot with them; they knew nothing of him, cared nothing; he was a stranger, and felt as if he must always remain a stranger, to their life. And the passage of this dumb multitude troubled him in another way. The people moving to and fro along that avenue of light were actually living under the shadow of a terror; they were the men and women who had held the barricades in the first three days of the revolution, who had been sprayed with death from the machine-guns of the Royal Guard and had swamped the streets with the blood of the fourth day's massacres. It seemed to him suddenly that he had been a fool to mix himself in their affairs, that they must work out their own salvation, that they would actually resent the interference of a stranger such as himself.

In any case he found himself faced by a new obstacle, for he had expected that the *Boston Hall* would discharge her cargo on one of the quays and that he would be able to slip ashore without difficulty. As it was, she seemed to be isolated; for apart from a naval pinnace that had hailed and passed her at the entrance of the harbour and accompanied her to her moorings, no boat from the shore came near her. She lay there silently like a ship in quarantine untouched by the hallucinated activities of the quays, and Bryden's imagination was already so tense that he resented the least delay.

While he stood there staring at the land, his eyes fascinated by the progress of a brilliantly lighted tram-car that stole smoothly along the quays, Fisher came up to him and slapped him on the back.

'This is a fine business!' he grumbled.

'Why, what's up?' Bryden asked.

'Discharging cargo into lighters to-morrow morning. Orders from the government not to land at the quays.

There's a special word come round from the skipper that no one's allowed on shore here. Got to stay aboard this packet looking at the damned view for a week. That's why they keep us hanging out here. The boatswain says as any man going on shore is liable to get a bullet in his back as soon as look at you. And that's what they call a free country! That's their revolution for you! I say it's a fine business if a chap can't go ashore after three weeks in a stokehold to get a drink and ease himself! I didn't come to —— old Pergusa to watch the —— trams, I tell you straight! And what's more, my son, I'm going ashore, and if they wants to put a bullet in me, let them, and be damned to them! Things have come to a fine —— pass when they won't let you look at a woman. Damn the old man, and damn the lot of them, I say!'

He went on cursing fluently until Bryden was forced to laugh at him; but even as he laughed at Fisher's violent complaints he was realising that he might turn the man's resentment to his own profit. It was clear that Fisher meant what he said, and Bryden saw at once that it would be far easier for two men to land in Pergusa than one. He pulled Fisher up short and asked him how he was going to get ashore.

'How? Never you fear! It's not the first time I've been landed like this. I shall get ashore somehow.'

He became boastful, declaring that he'd never been beaten yet and wasn't going to be now; bragged how he had landed in Lisbon against orders during the revolution that ended in Manoel's abdication, but offered no suggestion as to what he was going to do in this case. Bryden began to feel that he had made a mistake in counting on him as an ally. He had heard enough in his time of the English workman's grumbling: a violence which, luckily for public order, usually begins and ends in talk. He began to suspect that Fisher's grousing had no deeper significance.

'Look here, Fish,' he said, 'if you want to go ashore I'll go along with you.'

The big man stared at him. Probably he hadn't expected to be taken seriously; but in any case the offer put him on his metal.

'D'you mean that, Bob?' he said.

'You're a fine chap!' said Bryden. 'Now you want to back out of it. Well, don't mind me.'

'Back out of it?' said Fisher, angrily. 'I've told you just what I think of it. I'll see the lot of them damned first before they stops me! I'm a man, I am, not a blooming kid!'

'Well, what about to-night?' said Bryden.

This was travelling rather too fast for Fisher, but his pride wouldn't let him show it. He gave Bryden a poke in the ribs. 'What's the game, Bob?' he said.

'You're not the only man on the ship,' Bryden laughed, 'so don't you think it! The question is how the devil we can work it.'

'That's simple enough if a chap could speak the lingo,' said Fisher. 'Take a trip in one of these here boats.' And he pointed to a wavering constellation of lights that were now skimming over the water toward the *Boston Hall*.

'Coming out with fruit and that,' he explained. 'They always does in this port; and if it was daylight you'd see the nippers that dives for coppers. Anything for money! They're a poor lot these here Trinacrians, bar the women. *They're* all right though, you can take my word for it. Why didn't they teach you the language at school, Bob?'

'I dare say I can try my hand at it,' said Bryden.

Fisher gave him up. 'Well, you're a bloody marvel and no mistake!'

By this time the cluster of lights had disentangled itself into an elongated string. The plash of oars was heard, and the reflections of fishing flares slung from the bows of the approaching boats danced on the black unbroken surface of the water. In each of them a rower stood amidships, bending forward to his stroke, and in the stern of each another man crouched between baskets full of fruit and vegetables. The leading boat approached at an astonishing pace; the rower shipped his oars, and she slid cunningly alongside the iron flanks of the *Boston Hall*. One by one the others followed her till four or five were stretched in a line, their owners clamouring as they held up baskets of

brightly-coloured fruit. Indeed they were more than usually eager for commerce, for the desertion of what was once a busy harbour had spoiled their trade. The chief steward descended the gangway and began to bargain. The captain leaned over above him and watched the Trinacrians with contempt in his eyes, while the fat little cook slunk out of the fo'c'sle galley, threw a rope ladder over the side, and began to argue with the boatload nearest to him in a sort of pidgin cockney, which for some reason he imagined to be intelligible to all foreigners. Strangely enough he got what he wanted, and came panting up the ladder with a basket of cauliflowers mixed with peaches and aubergines in his hand. 'That's the way to do it,' he said with a triumphant wink at Bryden and Fisher. ''Alf what the blighters arst for 'em. That's what I paid!'

Meanwhile a single boat, obviously a fishing craft that had fallen in with the others and followed them out of curiosity, stole in to the side of the *Boston Hall*, immediately beneath the place where Bryden and Fisher were standing. In its stern a very old man sat chewing tobacco and taking no notice, as it seemed, of his surroundings. The second hand, who had brought the boat alongside, a tall swarthy fellow with a magnificent bare chest, and a knitted cap pulled tightly over his round head, looked up at them, smiling, and offered a lobster for sale.

'This is the chap for us,' said Bryden. He addressed him in Trinacrian, and the fellow started as if he had been shot.

'I want to get ashore,' Bryden said. 'There are two of us.'

The young man smiled, but shook his head. It was impossible, he declared, for no boat was allowed to have commerce with a foreign ship without a permit from the police, and the landing quays were full of Carabineers who scrutinised the papers of every one who landed, and even collected the permits to fish, the permits to trade, the permits to row for pleasure. This, he explained by way of information, was the result of a revolution. The Carabineers, in fact, were no longer Carabineers,

but Republican Guards; but that, God knew, hadn't changed their nature as enemies of the people.'

'My friend has business on shore,' said Bryden. 'It is most necessary that he should land.'

The boatman shrugged his shoulders. 'Eh! . . . the first thing necessary is a permit.'

'Listen. His business is peculiar.' 'He wants to see a lady,' said Bryden. 'Does the Republic issue permits for that?'

The boatman laughed out loud. No; but he expected they'd start it next week.

'That's why my friend is in such a hurry,' said Bryden, and the boatman solemnly agreed that such was human nature. Bryden expanded on the agonies of continence that the innocent Fisher had undergone.

'And thyself?' asked the boatman with a leer.

'I also am human,' Bryden admitted.

In this way he laughed him into a good-humour, finally convincing him that they were not political agents in disguise, but seamen out for a spree, as one of them certainly was. The rower exchanged a few words in dialect with the old man who sat chewing in the stern, but he, having reached an age that is unsympathetic towards the ardours of youth, mumbled something in which the word 'money' was all that Bryden could distinguish. The other turned to them with a gesture of despair. 'You see . . .' he said.

'You shall have your money,' Bryden hastened to assure him. 'My friend and I have two months' pay in our pockets. What is the use of money on board ship? Spend it while you're alive to do so, that's my motto.' He had scarcely spoken the words before he realised he had made a false step, but it was to late. He blundered on. 'How much?' he asked.

The boatman whispered again to the old man, and, smiling, named an impossible sum. 'In gold,' he added, as a greedy after-thought. Bryden offered him a third, which he accepted without hesitation. 'But if you have not a permit the Carabineers will shoot you as soon as you land. They are in good practice, I warn you.' He explained, in a whisper, that in any case it would not be possible to land them on the quay. The

only thing that he could do for them without risk to himself, was to drop them on the end of an unfinished breakwater that he could approach without arousing suspicion under the pretence of looking for crayfish. Bryden must pay the gold before he was landed, and once on the breakwater the foreigners must fend for themselves. 'Though it is understood that you will be shot by the Carabineers,' he said finally.

'Perfectly,' Bryden assured him.

'What a thing is love!' the boatman sighed.

Bryden turned to Fisher who had been listening, bewildered, to this colloquy.

'It's all right, Fish,' he said. 'They'll take us and land us on the point over there. After that we've got to work on our own. There's a good chance of getting shot, he says. Still game?'

'What the hell do you take me for?' said Fisher angrily.

'All serene. Then what you'd better do is drop that ladder of the cook's over the starboard side; but get a move on while they're busy with the other boats. Roll it up as if you were doing a job of work, and shoot it down quietly on the far side of that ventilator.'

The well deck was deserted, for the hands were astern, and Pryce still snorted in his bunk. The cook stood in the galley door feeding his Java sparrow with fruit, and addressing it as if it were a canary. Bryden signed to the boatman to bring his craft round to the starboard side. The man pulled her with the grip of his hands round the sharp-cut bow of the *Boston Hall*. Meanwhile Fisher had rolled up the ladder and dropped it foot by foot over the side.

'Sweet!' said the cook, 'Sweet!' And the sparrow pecked the juice out of his peach.

In another moment Bryden and Fisher found themselves crouching in the bottom of the boat amongst a writhing mass of shellfish, and the rower was urging her with long strokes out into the darkness in the direction of the unfinished mole. Suddenly, when the lights of the *Boston Hall* were shining far behind, and the shore seemed more distant than ever, the old man signed to him and he stopped.

'What is it?' Bryden asked.

'It displeases me,' said the boatman, smiling, 'but my father has changed his mind. He says it is ten pounds sterling.'

'Very well.' A dialect phrase of Carmela's came into Bryden's mind. 'One will talk of that at eight!' he said. It was the Pergusan equivalent of the Greek Kalends. The old man snarled.

'What's up?' asked Fisher anxiously.

'Says he wants ten pounds. I told him he can whistle for it.'

'The blighter!'

'Get on with you!' said Bryden to the boatman.

'My father,' the young man replied politely,' says that if you do not hand me all the money of which you spoke on board your ship, I am to row you ashore and denounce you to the Carabineers on the quay, telling them that you wished to go ashore without a permit. Then, most certainly, you will be shot.'

'A thousand thanks,' said Bryden.' No doubt you think that because you are standing up with an oar in your hand and we are in the bottom of the boat you can do what you like with us. You're mistaken. If you care to strike a match you will see that I've a revolver in my hand. If you don't stick to your bargain you'll probably get a bullet in your bowels and feed the dog-fish. If you do, you'll get your money, as we agreed. Is that understood.'

'Certainly,' said the boatman, and settled again into his steady and extremely graceful stroke.

'Seems you've fixed him,' laughed Fisher.

'Yes, I've fixed the swine.'

Five minutes later they both scrambled out on to the slippery boulders of the mole. The boatman, apparently satisfied with his bargain, wished them a successful end to their evening, and pulled off into the dark. It didn't, for the present, feel like a very successful beginning.

3

As Fisher said, it was as dark as hell. They scrambled together over the loose stones at the end of the mole, reaching at length a line of unfinished coping surmounted by the forlorn shapes of cranes and derricks that had been used in earlier stages of the work. These rusty monsters rose above them like relics of a dead civilisation. In five minutes, walking as silently as was possible, and taking cover whenever they could, they reached the point at which the mole joined the line of quays. For the present their caution seemed to have been wasted, for they saw no sign of a sentry, or indeed of any other kind of life. On either side, as far as they could see, a line of hangars and warehouses faced the harbour. It was natural that these should be silent at this time of the evening, but to Bryden they seemed as if they had been deserted for years, so spectral did their shapes appear in the darkness. Beyond the warehouses ran a double line of railway, complicated here and there by sidings. They crossed this network cautiously. Luck was with them, it seemed; for less than fifty yards away appeared a length of empty roadway, lit by rare and feeble lamps. They quickened their pace, but soon saw that they had congratulated themselves too soon. Between them and the roadway stretched a barrier of iron railings topped by an overhanging *chevaux-de-frise*. To climb it at the best of times would have been a dangerous undertaking.

'I guess I could manage that,' said Fisher.

Bryden shook his head. 'Not good enough,' he said. 'If a patrol came along when we were on a job like that they'd riddle us with bullets and leave us hanging there like a pair of crows to frighten the others. No luck. Let's work along to the left.'

Fisher laughed, but his laugh was a little uneasy, and Bryden began to wonder if the man had understood that he was serious when he told him that they stood a good chance of being shot. Hugging the shadow of the hangars they passed quietly along, and here another

barrier faced them, for the line of railings only ended at a point where a channel of water, choked with lighters, cut inward from the harbour beneath the roadway into the Customs' basin. Under the arch of the bridge they could see other lighters, shrouded in tarpaulins, that lay there awaiting the discharge of their cargo. A single railway bridge spanned the mouth of this canal, but they dared not risk crossing it for Bryden was sure that there, at any rate, a sentry must be posted.

They crouched in the shadow of the last warehouse debating what they should do. The docks seemed more quiet than ever. Beneath their whispers they could hear the scuttling of rats in the building behind them, and always the distant rumour of Pergusa, humming like an immense dynamo that lit a tawny reflex in the sky. While they were whispering together, Fisher clutched at Bryden's arm and pointed. On the end of the narrow bridge Bryden saw the sudden glow of a struck match. It flared up and illumined the face and hat of a Carabineer who was lighting his cigar.

'No go!' said Bryden. 'We'd better have a shot at the other side, and see where the railings end.' The thought of this barrier was beginning to obsess him. It was like being in a cage, and he couldn't believe that any hole in the cage would be left unguarded, for the Tinacrian Customs, in spite of their notorious corruption under the old régime, always made the most of appearances. They hurried back along the quays in the other direction for half a mile, and all the way the impassable line of railings kept them company. Twice they halted and took cover, disturbed by the apparition of a drowsy sentry in the cocked hat of the Republican Guard. By this time Fisher was getting sulky. 'Looks as if we'll have to swim back to the ship,' he said. 'This is a b—— fine picnic!'

Even as he spoke they heard the sound of rusty levers moving, and the points of the rail in front of them were pulled into place by some distant and invisible agency. A moment later the headlight of an engine appeared; it stole past them with clanking

pistons and pulled up in a hiss of steam, obeying some signal that they could not see. A train of twelve wagons came to rest behind it with a noise of jangled couplings. 'Come on!' said Bryden.

They left their shelter and climbed quickly into the nearest truck. It was loaded with flat cakes of sulphur from the south, among which they settled down as best they could. Here they crouched, for an hour it seemed, until the echo of the engine's whistle went shrilling along the line of hangars, the truck gave a lurch forward, and the whole train got under way. A moment later a change in the note of the rumbling wheels told them that they were crossing the guarded bridge at the mouth of the customs-basin.

'So long, old cock!' said Fisher to the unconscious sentry, 'this is all right if we knew where the damned thing was going.'

Moving at the same slow rate, halting, as it seemed, for every fifty yards of progress, the train stole along the face of the quays. Through the endless barrier of railings Bryden could now see the boulevard whose lights had shone out over the water to the *Boston Hall*, the bright terraces of cafés set with tables, the moving throng on the pavements. The engine went stuttering into a tunnel and left these behind. For a good twenty minutes they hung there in sulphurous darkness. By this time Fisher was too bored to talk, and Bryden, left alone with his thoughts and his unduly sensitive conscience, began to be troubled, not for himself, but for his friend. It seemed to him that in his anxiety to get ashore he had played a shabby trick on the innocent Fisher; he wondered if Fisher had really understood him when he said that the trip was dangerous, envisaged the various tragic ends that might overtake his confiding friend. He began to sentimentalise Fisher's virtues, remembering what a good pal he had been to him throughout the voyage. It was a poor return for this kindness to bring him on an escapade that might easily end with a bullet in the brain. The importance of his own adventure, this culmination of plans for which he had striven for more than six months, dwindled to nothing beside his obligation to Fisher. Somehow he

must get the man out of the scrape into which he had landed him. Somehow.

The train emerged from the tunnel; the engine passed a patrol of Carabineers unchallenged. At last they were free of the docks. A moment later they pulled up again in a siding beneath the tall backs of houses. Bryden shook Fisher by the shoulder to rouse him. He had actually fallen asleep. They climbed out on to the lines and scaled the embankment on the opposite side. A lemon-plantation bordered the railway at this point. In the starlight they could see the low trees burdened with pale fruit. Under the shadow of the grove they paused. Bryden felt that he could not go another step without explaining to his companion exactly what he had let him in for. He did so, as bluntly as he could, making the worst of their prospects and his own part in them. In his interest for Fisher, whom he now considered as his victim, he forgot all about his own business.

'The best way to get back on board the ship,' he said, 'is to work along the shore here, well outside of the harbour until we find a boat or a man who owns one. We shall have a good chance of landing safely in the dark, and you'll be well out of it.'

Fisher only stared at him. 'And what the hell's all this about?' he said hoarsely. 'Look here, kid, d'you know what I come ashore for?'

Certainly, Bryden knew.

'Well, I'm going to get it,' said Fisher, 'and if I get a bullet in me on the way that's *my* lookout, not yours. What I want first is a wet. My throat's like a match end with that there brimstone.'

He left it at that; but Bryden knew in the bottom of his mind that he could not be happy till Fisher was safely back on the ship.

They found their drink in a little wine shop by the local customs barrier. In the early morning no doubt it was a busy place, thronged with country people, who drove in their produce in painted carts and silted up behind the barrier like leaves caught by a branch on a flooded river. At night, however, being on the edge of a lonely country noted for its crimes of violence,

the place was deserted. The shop was illuminated by a single candle stuck to the top of an upturned barrel with its own tallow, and the landlord, having surveyed them by this light and decided that they were harmless, returned to the oily mess that he had been frying and left them with a litre of sweet Pergusan wine, so dark that it looked as if it had been mixed with the volcanic soil.

Fisher drank it eagerly, smacking his lips. 'This is something like!' he said. 'It don't half remind me of the last time I was here.' Bryden drank very little. His mind too was full of memories, provoked, most probably, by the sweet fumes of the charcoal furnace that filled the room with an odour as of pine cones cracking in the sun. The doubting mood in which the thing of greatest importance to him had been Fisher's safety, had vanished. It now seemed impossible to him that he could have been such a fool as to consider it. He recognised his own characteristic and possibly fatal weakness. He saw that, in a moment, with a less obstinate companion than Fisher, he might have sacrificed the whole structure that he had so elaborately planned and for which he had suffered already. The mood of exalted anticipation returned. He stepped out of the wine-shop as though he were consciously going to find his fate. So much are we the slaves of our senses, that the suggestions of a puff of wood smoke will send a man's spirit to the ends of the earth.

Fisher, by this time, was talkative. 'Once you get me in the middle of the town,' he said, 'I can find my way all right. I tell you, Bob, I can smell the place like I only left it yesterday. Follow the old trams. That's the ticket!'

So they passed into the centre of Pergusa through the mean roads of the suburbs with low houses on either side, and between them an earth road worn to the rock by the wheels of springless country carts. It was very dark. No lights could be seen in all the buildings, but an occasional candle flame in a wine-shop of the kind in which they had already refreshed themselves. This was not unnatural, for the people who live in the outskirts of the city work for the most part in the fields,

rising at dawn and sleeping again at sunset; but for all that the effect of solitude and desertion was sinister, the wide open streets were like those of a city visited by a plague or devastated by earthquake. Bryden was acutely sensitive to these impressions; but Fisher, still inflamed by his draught of volcanic wine, did not appear to notice them. He talked and laughed so loudly that Bryden had to beg him to be quiet. One might as well have sung in a mortuary; and, apart from that, it was unwise to call attention needlessly to their presence.

Then, suddenly it seemed, the road narrowed. They had left the new-built shanties of the suburbs and penetrated the most characteristic quarter of Pergusa, the mass of buildings that had risen toward the end of the Middle Ages when the nobility of Trinacria was at the height of its feudal power: a quarter of frowning palaces, crowded one against the other on either side of a narrow street. The sight of these immense masses of stone affected Bryden with a feeling of solemnity, for here the apparent desertion of the suburbs was replaced by the more definite symbols of a departed glory. He walked no longer through the shell of a living city that had been overwhelmed by some acute disaster. The streets to which they had come were older, more majestic, and as impressive in their fate as a vast uninhabited ruin of the desert. Remote, unimpassioned, the great palaces stood side by side as though they found a conscious dignity in the fact that they rose together high and cold above the passions of the new régime.

Bryden shivered. It was from these great houses, he reflected, that men and women had been dragged out to massacre in the three days of the terror less than six months before. The houses of Street of Palaces had seen these things; but not the least sense of horror clung to their stones. They were too old, too stable to be troubled by the misadventures of a day, they, who had seen the fall of other dynasties and the rise of stranger powers. Their silence said to him: 'These things do not touch us. We stand, and await the revenges of time.' Indeed the spirit of the

place descended so heavily on him that for a moment Bryden was carried away in spite of himself (or perhaps through some strain in himself of which he was not aware) by the romance of aristocracy as represented by the stoical and admirable aspect of these stone palaces with their rows of shuttered windows. Their magnitude, their patience, their unnatural calm made the flaming human enthusiasms of Massa seem a little cheap and modern. Their influence hung over Bryden with the weight of an oppressive dream of whose unreality he was conscious, even though he could not break its spell and force himself to wake. Even Fisher was silent, not because of any similar emotion, but with a rich and vinous content. Bryden almost wished that the stoker would burst out into one of his music-hall songs . . . anything to break the influence of the silence in which their footsteps echoed.

4

Relief came suddenly. At the end of the street they reached a barricade that had been erected during the terror, an affair of sandbags mingled with massive slabs of stone uprooted from the street. Against it lay piled the wreckage of an armoured car. They passed through a narrow gap that had been cleared between the barrier and the wall and emerged into the central square of Pergusa, lately renamed by Massa the Place of the People. The nobility of the sight swept every other thought from Bryden's brain. Opposite the point of their emergence the Byzantine towers of the cathedral rose into an indigo sky. To the left lay the square block that had been the Royal Palace, before which a garden of feathery palm-trees made an oasis of cool darkness, separating the ancient consciousness of Pergusa from its modern life as typified by a busy tramway centre, full of light and movement and noisy with the clanging of bells. By this time Fisher had grasped his bearings. He made straight for one of the glittering cafés beyond the tramway lines,

blindly, like a moth drawn out of the darkness, murmuring something about another drink. Bryden restrained him with difficulty. 'If you know your way you'd much better find it while you can walk straight,' he said with a laugh.

'Know my way!' said Fisher. 'I could find it with my eyes shut.' But when he had asserted his independence by damning Bryden's eyes, he allowed himself to be dissuaded, particularly when Bryden pointed out to him that the terraces were crowded with officers of the Red Army and their women.

At the corner of the square, another encounter took Bryden's breath away. Just in front of them, walking the pavement with the measured gait of a street-woman, he saw a figure that stabbed his memory. In height, in pose, in the very turn of her head he could have sworn it was that of Carmela. He found himself trembling, not with a renewal of passion—that was impossible—but with something like fear. As he passed he stole a glance at her, and she, mistaking his intentions, smiled back at him. He saw, with relief, that his fears had been groundless.

'Come on!' said Fisher, 'that's not your sort!' But even if he smiled, Bryden went on his way curiously perturbed; for though the face that she had turned to him was not Carmela's, it was indeed a dreadful caricature of it: the face of Carmela dreadfully debased, its clean lines turned to hardness, its childishness perverted to a precocious guile. And yet so like! But for the spirit this was the face of the woman he had loved. He laughed at himself, and yet, through all that evening he could not escape from a sense of Carmela's presence. The physical type of the Pergusan lower classes is well defined, and a dozen times on the way to the establishment—half wine-shop, half brothel—to which his companion was taking him, he was startled by transitory visions of the same kind crossing his path. He wondered if it were possible that when she left him Carmela had returned to Pergusa, and hoped that she had not; for he dreaded to awaken memories of an experience that he had determined to forget, and, in any case, he might find it inconvenient to be known.

In ten minutes they found themselves skirting the outer side of the harbour railings that had balked them earlier in the evening. By this time, with his goal almost in view, Fisher was in the best and noisiest of spirits. He stopped to stare at the picket of Carabineers who stood on guard at the main entrance of the dock with bayonets fixed, and Bryden induced him to move with difficulty, for wine had made the stoker quarrelsome, and he resented any interference. They stood wrangling in the centre of the road and would have attracted the attention of the guard by their foreign speech, had not a clanging tram-car descended on them so swiftly that Bryden had to pull his friend away to save him from destruction. This emergency made Fisher forget his grievance. In a fit of enthusiasm he decided that Bryden was the best pal he'd ever had. 'But I'm going to give you a treat, and don't you forget it!' he said hoarsely.

He now knew exactly where he was, and a moment later he had pulled Bryden into a narrow alley spanned at an immense height by strings of dirty washing hung out to dry from the houses that stooped on either side. This alley wore a curious air of secrecy, arising not so much from its rows of shuttered windows as from the darkness that possessed it. They groped their way along its centre, stumbling over heaps of uncollected garbage, and barely avoiding a sudden descent into the main sewer through a pit where some bomb or shell had torn a crater in the middle of the road. The street itself was like a closed sewer running straight out of what foulness God alone knew. And all the time Bryden was conscious of small groups of men, whose faces were indistinguishable in the darkness, standing in the shadow of the houses or at the archways of hidden courtyards, whispering together with an air of conspiracy. These little knots of men gave him the sinister suggestion of nests of fire smouldering unseen in the ruins of a burnt house; and the fantastic figure was nearer to truth than he imagined, for the infamous warren that lies behind the docks at Pergusa and had swamped the streets with its vermin during the days of the terror, was as little subject to the power of the

Republic as it had ever been to that of the fallen dynasty. In those streets the Revolution had loosened forces of destruction that it could not hope to control.

Fisher went stumbling onward, still confident of his path and insensitive to the threatening atmosphere that surrounded them, but the fear that they would lose their way was the least of those that troubled Bryden's mind, and the event soon justified his mistrust. Suddenly, behind them, a revolver shot rang out and the sound spread in a wave of shattering echoes from the houses on either side. A man's voice cried for help, and, in a moment it seemed, the whole street broke out into a crackle of fire. People were firing from the shuttered windows above them, from the roofs of the houses, from every dark archway that could give a foot of cover. Fisher stood open-mouthed in the middle of the road. As Bryden pulled him into the shadow of the nearest wall a stream of men ran past them in twos and threes, running for their lives with their heads down. One of them fell and slid forward, his hands outspread, with the impetus of his haste. Another rolled over into a heap of refuse. Bryden had seen men fall like that during his old days in the salient. The street was swept with rifle fire, and men ran before it in a panic blind to anything but a herd instinct of flight.

'Better get inside somewhere,' said Bryden, but by this time every door and every courtyard was closed. Hugging the walls as closely as they could, they made their way toward the end of the street, hoping that there a turn might take them out of the field of fire; but in this they were disappointed, for the road ended with a cul-de-sac in which all the fugitives who had passed them were herded like animals in a shambles. Some, in an ecstasy of terror, were tearing the shutters from the windows of the nearest houses in a hope of escape, but the people within were as terrified as they, and on the sills of the shattered windows men and women were fighting like beasts thrusting back the invaders. The rifle fire dropped. Only from the roofs and windows an occasional revolver shot was heard. An armoured car came slowly bumping over the flags.

Behind it, hugging the wall as Bryden and Fisher had done, followed a platoon of the Republican Guard. The driver of the car switched on a searchlight, and the mass of wounded and living in which the two men now found themselves wedged, was illumined with a white and ghastly light. An officer shouted orders and the guard closed upon them. In one swift moment Bryden saw Fisher laying about him right and left with his fists; in the next the butt of a rifle came swinging to his temple, and a flash of blinding light ushered him into a darkness through which something limp and heavy like his own body was falling.

The Third Chapter

MASSA

I

THOSE of their prisoners who could walk the Carabineers marched off between two files of bayonets. The dead they left unburied where they had fallen, and Bryden would have lain with them had not a sudden gleam of consciousness made him open his eyes again on that most miserable scene. They stared into those of a fat sanitary corporal, and as Bryden's head swam back again into dizzy darkness, he felt his body being lifted on to a cart that was already heaped with the other wounded. The blow from the rifle butt had only lightly stunned him, and the jolting of the springless cart over uneven setts soon brought him once more to himself. He opened his eyes painfully, for his head was splitting. The cart dragged up a narrow street. From crowded balconies on either side families who were taking the evening air looked curiously down, unmoved, as it seemed, by the vehicle's bloody load. The word 'anarchists' floated down to him softly in a woman's voice, and with it memory returned to him, so that he realised at last why he was lying in the bottom of a cart soaked with the blood and foul with the bodily exhalations of other people. Before this moment he had accepted the state without a question, as one accepts the enormities of dreams.

A sentry challenged. The cart stopped for a moment and then lurched on beneath an archway. Men in iron-gray overalls began to unload it under the directions of another in white. Blood dripped over the tail of the cart. One of the men in gray ran in a hurry and strewed sawdust on it. It hurt Bryden to keep his eyes open. He lay there, waiting his turn for what heaven only knew,

hearing a jumble of Trinacrian words. They soothed him. He felt the absolute resignation and disinterest in the activities around him that he had experienced once before in the Casualty Clearing Station at Hazebrouck. He thought: 'Good God! I've forgotten my regimental number,' and was just consoling himself with the reflection that it was probably on the Casualty ticket when some one gave him a kick in the back. A voice said: 'This one's dead, Lieutenant,' and a hand that gripped his shoulder awoke him to the fact that 'this one' was himself. The figure in white, a young man with a blotched complexion like that of a butcher's assistant, was bending over him breathing garlic into his face. 'Dead?' he said. 'Dead? He's as much alive as I am. Where is his wound? Look quickly!' The men in gray began to fumble with Bryden's limbs. 'You see, he's not wounded!' cried the surgeon testily. 'The blood comes from the others. He should have been taken to the prison, not brought here. What fools we have to deal with! If only a revolution could kill off the fools!' He shook Bryden's body viciously. 'Stand up!' he shouted. 'Stand up, you dog!'

It was all the same to Bryden. He stood up, or rather tried to do so, pitching forward ridiculously on to his hands and knees.

Many hours later, as it seemed, he woke. His splitting headache had disappeared, leaving nothing but a curious sensation of emptiness in the place where his brains had been. He found his body stretched out on a straw mattress in an immense room with a domed ceiling. The ceiling was painted, but though his eyes stared straight up at it he could not make out any design since the only light in the room was given by a wick that burned with a sluggish flame in a saucer of oil. On each side of him—so near that if he had moved an arm he would have touched them—lay another figure. There must have been fifty or sixty of them in the room, and the stench was as the stench of five hundred, a sickening smell of undressed wounds. Bryden's powers of reasoning returned. Decidedly this was not Hazebrouck! Indeed, the Northern

powers, by the institution which they cynically called a Sanitary Cordon, had succeeded in depriving Trinacria of such prime sanitary necessities as dressings and antiseptics, and the prison hospital at Pergusa was no different from any other in that unhappy country.

Little by little Bryden realised what had happened and guessed where he was. Though it still hurt him he compelled himself to think. He knew that something of the utmost importance was clamouring for expression. What could it be? Money? He searched in the lining of his trousers for the place where he had sewn his bank notes. He felt them, a thick wad of paper, still undisturbed. So far so good. But it wasn't for money that his spirit was so anxious. His revolver? That had gone. Of course it had gone. In any case it would be useless. What then could it be? He closed his eyes. In a case of this kind it was no good racking a tired brain, and in a moment the thing for which he had been searching came to him with shattering vividness. Fisher . . . What had happened to Fisher?

The oppressive sense of responsibility that had troubled him earlier in their adventure returned a thousand times more strongly. He was tortured by the uncertainty of what had happened to his friend. He rose, cautiously propped on his hands, and this time without giddiness, to see if he could distinguish Fisher's form among the masses of wounded. Of course it was useless. In that feeble light one figure looked just like another. Time after time, when his quick mind was running feverishly in search of other things, the vision of Fisher as he last saw him held it and possessed it: Fisher, standing up like a blonde Viking fighting for his life with his fists. At last, still harassed by the same haunting anxiety, he fell asleep again.

When he woke once more the gilded ceiling was touched with early sunshine and the doctor, still unshaved and wearing the bloodstained overall of the night before, was moving round the ward separating the living from the dead. A single glance from him was enough for Bryden. 'Here's your corpse of last night!' he snarled at the orderly. 'Send him along to San

Constanzo at noon.' As an afterthought he screwed up his eyes and stared at Bryden's face. 'I suppose you're all right?' he said. 'They don't kill your kind easily.' Bryden begged him for a word in private.'

'I've no time to waste in hearing people's grievances,' said the surgeon, passing on. But a second later he turned. Something of refinement in Bryden's speech must have struck him and set him wondering what a man of his class was doing among such a degraded company. Probably he guessed that the prisoner was a proscribed aristocrat whom the guard had mopped up with the others from the slum in which he had been hiding. He came back close to Bryden's mattress and bent over him.

'Well, what is it?' he said.

'I am an Englishman,' said Bryden. In Red Trinacria he could not have produced a worse recommendation to mercy. Every Trinacrian knew from Massa's press that it was because of England that the country starved. But in Pergusa their remained the memory of a still older tradition that all Englishmen had money, and the surgeon's face grew eager.

'An Englishman!' he said. 'Then what are you doing here? Give me your papers.'

Bryden confessed that he had none.

'An Englishman with no papers? That is ridiculous. You know as well as I do that all foreigners are compelled by law to carry papers. Ridiculous. You are wasting my time.'

'I only landed from a ship last night. I know nothing of the new laws,' Bryden explained.

'Ignorance is no excuse,' said the surgeon loftily. Then snatching at a new excuse for violence. 'But you are lying. What you say is impossible. Thanks to the English, no foreign ship has landed at Pergusa for six months. Evidently you are mad.'

'If your excellency will look in the harbour you will see her.' The surgeon flushed. In spite of its suppression this form of address flattered him.

'The ship is called the *Boston Hall*.

'Boston? That is American. But it is all the same.'

'With a cargo of coal.'

'Ah, yes,' said the surgeon dreamily, 'the coal has come. I heard so, last night. But what are you doing here without a permit? Tell me that!'

Bryden lied boldly. 'I have come here on a special mission to the Dictator. If your excellency will help me to transmit a message to Massa himself.'

'Impossible. How do we know that you are not an assassin?'

'But I could not possibly assassinate him by letter. The Dictator knows my name. During his exile in London I was his friend.'

'Great men are never at a loss for friends as soon as they become prosperous,' sniffed the surgeon.

But Bryden saw that he was impressed; there remained the final and most persuasive of arguments.

'If a letter might be taken from me to Massa, and a reply received, I should be happy to present the agent with an honorarium.'

'Yes . . . ?'

'Of five hundred francs.'

The surgeon turned to his orderly. 'Bring this prisoner to my room when I have finished with the others,' he said.

An hour later, Bryden, still a trifle unsteady on his feet, was marched along to a bare stone chamber like a prison cell, in which the surgeon kept his papers. Here, within closed doors, the official's manner changed, for by this time he had decided that politeness in private might atone for his roughness in the ward. He provided Bryden with pen and paper and stood over him as he wrote. The English puzzled him.

'What is this language?' he asked suspiciously.

'I am writing in English.'

'I do not approve of this. It is important that I should know what you are writing.'

'But why? The nature of the letter, after all, is private. I have told you I cannot assassinate the Dictator by letter.'

The surgeon shook his head. 'If I do not understand what you are writing how can I know that the letter is not full of insults? Would you have a minor official like myself submit a letter of insults to the Dictator?

And perhaps,' he added, 'lose my honorarium as well.'

Bryden tore up his letter and wrote another in Trinacrian. While he did so, the surgeon stooped and picked up the fragments of the first.

'You had better read this,' Bryden said. 'Please tell me if you find anything objectionable.'

The surgeon read it slowly. 'No. I see nothing objectionable, so long as it is not written in cipher.'

'But, if the Dictator understands the code, surely . . .' Bryden began.

'Very well. We will say no more. The question of the honorarium remains between us as between men of honour. I understand that you are not acquainted with the new laws. In some respects they are a little severe. The acceptance of money by officials is forbidden; but if you leave this prison I feel sure that you would not like me to remain unpaid for my professional attentions to you last night.'

The only professional attention that Bryden remembered was the kick in the ribs that had first roused him, but he quickly tumbled to the surgeon's idea.

'Not only that,' he said. 'I shall also be under the obligation of mentioning your valuable services to my friend the Dictator.'

The surgeon bowed him out of his cell, and he returned to the intolerable odours of the ward.

It was fortunate for his feelings that sheer exhaustion soon compelled him to sleep, for the sun had risen on a day of intense heat that penetrated even the massive walls of the prison. A basin of brown horse-beans had been placed at his side while he slept, but when he opened his eyes he found that its contents had vanished, and he was not sorry, for the very thought of food in such surroundings revolted his stomach. In place of it he took a tepid draught from a bottle that had been set between him and his right hand neighbour, who had died while Bryden slept. The water had the stale taste of the stuff that lies stagnant in a greenhouse tank.

Bryden wondered what time it was. He could not guess how long he had slept, but the sunlight had now disappeared from the gilding of the roof and he imagined

that it must be afternoon at least. The toll of a bell set him counting, but the strokes were lost in other overlapping waves of sound welling forth from a confusion of near and distant *campaniles*, and he gave it up. He lay with closed eyes for hour on hour. He was tormented with vermin, and whichever way he moved the mattress burned beneath him with the heat of his own body. Outside a fierce sirocco scorched the city, sucking all life out of the air that trembled above it.

If ever in his experience Bryden had an opportunity of communing with his soul, it was in these burning hours when he lay waiting for Massa's reply, half doubting, as the time dragged on, if any reply would come. His immediate fear for Fisher's safety and the misery of his own bruised and sweating body were always with him; but over and above these distresses the thing which his heart dreaded most deeply was the wreck of the ideal that had sustained him during his days of waiting in England. There, rising out of the mirk of the Trinacrian revolution, the name of Massa had beckoned him like a star. Remembering the man that he had known, he had imagined him master of a new world of clarity and light. To the romance with which his memories of childhood and his ties of blood had invested Trinacria had been added the enthusiasm of his political dreams. He had fretted because he could not be at his friend's side, helping with his own hands in the labour of creation, and even though this privilege was denied him, he had never for one moment wavered in his faith. For more than six months Massa had enjoyed an absolute power and Bryden, believing that the sinister stories of the English press were based on untruth and coloured by prejudice, had expected to find in Trinacria the state of his desire.

Now his heart failed him, for where he had looked for light and sweetness, he had found nothing but an exaggeration of all the dark and bitter evils of the old régime. He was not squeamish; he knew something of war and had seen bloodshed, but the memory of that packed cul-de-sac, where a mass of screaming men and women had been butchered in the darkness would not leave him. He remembered the brutal, uneasy arrogance

of the Republican Guard, the ministers of the new order, and though he dared not open his eyes he still saw the filth and degradation of the creatures who lay around him—the citizens of the new state. He remembered the surgeon in his bloody overall, fawning and callous by turns; and then he remembered Pergusa—not the city of light that he had imagined for himself, but the abode of darkness and disorder through which he had passed the night before: furtive, subdued, dejected, breathing an odour of death. The melancholy admonitions on the Street of Palaces returned to him, and his reeling imagination clutched blindly at the spirit of order inherent in their stones, their serene and classic calm even as it shrank from the sense of instability that he found in the power under whose hands they had fallen.

While his faith in Massa's personal ideals never failed him, he began to wonder if the influence of one man, however brightly his spirit burned, were strong enough to command a substitute for a civilisation that had been built up stone on stone by the hands of a hundred generations. He saw his Titan tottering beneath the weight that his destiny had compelled him to bear. The massacre in the streets, the filth and disorder of the prison, the brutality and corruption of the servants of the state, set him wondering if the spirit of man had sunk too low to respond to any miracle of conversion. Perhaps, in truth, the ponderous mechanism of civilisation was beginning all over again; for however enlightened the ideals of the new Republic may have been, its methods were uncommonly like those of the dark ages. For himself, he confessed unwillingly that he had no affinity with them. Better, a thousand times, the Street of Palaces.

So he dozed throughout the day, nauseated, humbled, disillusioned. At sunset the guard was changed and the wick in the saucer of oil relit. He began to doubt if the surgeon had kept his promise. Perhaps it would have been wiser to pay him in advance. Perhaps, once having learned that Bryden had money at his command, he intended to squeeze some more out of him while he had the chance. Perhaps his letter had been destroyed

by some officious secretary. Perhaps Massa had forgotten him.

Later in the evening the surgeon blundered in again, still dressed in his stained overall, and drenched with liquor. He wagged his finger at Bryden and smiled, addressing him in the polite form. 'I have a reply to your letter, he said. 'You may dress at your leisure. The Dictator will see you.'

'Dress?' Bryden indicated that he had no clothes but those in which he lay. They were damp with sweat, and the bloodstained patches had stiffened like boards.

'Then perhaps you will follow me?'

Once clear of the ward the surgeon's manner changed. He became ingratiating. 'If you will make your toilet in my room . . .' he said, stepping aside for Bryden to enter.

'I can go as I am,' said Bryden.

'As you please. And my honorarium? You will forgive my mentioning it?'

Bryden produced his wad of notes. The man's face fell when he saw how many there were. No doubt he was kicking himself for not having demanded more.

'It is understood,' he said hurriedly, 'that you do not mention this small matter to the Dictator. Otherwise . . .' He made a gesture of renunciation.

'Perfectly understood.'

He pressed Bryden's hand and bowed him out into the hands of an armed guard.

They travelled in one of the shaky phætons that rattle over the flags of Pergusa until they fall to pieces. To Bryden the streets seemed brighter than they had been the night before; but light could not give that city an air of happiness. The same restless, preoccupied crowd choked the pavements, and few turned to look at him or his guards, for the sight of a man under arrest had become so common in those days as not to arouse the least flicker of interest in the streets.

They left the port behind them, passed through the centre of the city, and turned upwards through the quarter that lies huddled round the base of the hill on which the Castle of San Constanzo stands. By this

time, thanks to the cooler air of the streets and the unspeakable relief that came to all his senses in leaving the prison ward behind, Bryden's spirits were beginning to rise. The omnipotent Massa would be able to solve all his problems: to free him from the load of responsibility toward Fisher, to set his political doubts at rest, even to restore his self-respect by lending him a razor and a suit of clean clothes.

The driver of the phæton threw the reins over the horse's back, encouraging it with agonised cries, and the little beast strained forward with outstretched head, scrambling rather than walking to the summit of the hill. They stopped, and Bryden was tumbled out. He found himself being marched through a wide archway where many officers were lounging in uniforms of the old Trinacrian army: sky-blue tunics frogged with cherry colour, gold and silver braidings by the yard. Bryden, his eyes used to the drab, efficient air of khaki, surveyed them critically. He saw that no protective or offensive colouring could make a Trinacrian look like a soldier. He noticed that all wore the red brassard that had been adopted as the mark of the Republican forces.

Neither the guard on duty nor any one of this shabby, bright-hued crowd took the least notice of Bryden and his escort. They passed on into the darkness of a courtyard, as big as the square of a country town and rather like it, being crammed full of unharnessed ammunition wagons parked in rows like farmers' carts at a market. Between the wagons many soldiers, among whom they had to pick their way, lay drunk or sleeping on the stones. On the far side of the courtyard they came to a long portico where a sentry who was actually on duty challenged them, examined their papers, and jerked his thumb toward a flight of steps. At the top of these they were challenged and passed once more, this time by a fat civilian who was sleeping with one eye open behind a wooden barrier set across the corridor. He woke to receive them, and having passed them into a room where he told them to wait, returned to finish his sleep.

2

In one respect at least the room was comfortable, for the walls of the fortress were thick enough to resist the heat of the sun, and on its domed ceiling, a legacy of Saracen art, an electric punkah as large as the propeller of an aeroplane sucked in a continuous current of air cooled by its passage through endless corridors of stone. It was nearly as bare as a barrack, and one of the guards, appreciating this, lit a cigarette. The other took off his cocked hat and flopped down in a chair.

Bryden, left standing, had an opportunity of examining what every instinct told him must be Massa's private room. On the right stood a camp-bedstead and a marble-topped washing table. On the wall opposite the door, between two uncurtained windows guarded by Persian blinds, hung a school map of South America, the property, no doubt, of some previous tenant. In the middle of the room a large deal table stood covered with papers in orderly heaps. Nowhere was there any ornament save a single picture hung carelessly, as it seemed, above the disused fireplace. To this picture, the only thing of beauty in the room, Bryden's attention turned instinctively. It was a Madonna of the Trinacrian Renaissance, a childish figure with a face of the most affecting simplicity set against a mysterious mountainous background. The peculiar quality of this blue distance, its suggestions of a happiness lost but remembered in this or in some other life, its fresh, unworldly beauty, drew Bryden out of himself and still held him wondering when Massa entered the room.

Then he awoke, and his heart leapt to meet him with a thrill of glad recognition. He saw the old Massa of the Café Pergusa, dressed in the same shabby black coat, which, in spite of the heat, he wore buttoned up to the neck, the same string of a white tie, the same felt hat pulled down above his eyes. Bryden felt himself strangely encouraged by the familiarity of these externals: they seemed to give him a guarantee that the inner man had changed as little; but Massa made no response

to his smile and outstretched hand. He spoke sharply to the guard, who had languidly taken the cigarette from his mouth and put his foot on it.

'Has the prisoner been searched?' he said.

'Who knows?' said the guard. 'My orders were to bring him here. That's all.'

Massa gave an exclamation of annoyance. Obviously his nerves were on edge. Bryden did not know that four attempts had been made on his life within a week.

'Search him at once!' he said, and moved behind the table as though he could not resist taking cover.

Bryden stood bewildered while the soldiers ran through his pockets, finding nothing but his bundle of banknotes, and all the time Massa was watching them from under his hat as though he expected a grenade to appear.

'Give those to me,' he said, and the guard handed him the notes, rather reluctantly, it seemed, as though he looked upon them as a perquisite. Massa stood counting them mechanically with his fingers, in threes. Bryden was almost conscious of the numbers forming in his mind: 'Nine, twelve, fifteen, eighteen.' Then Massa pushed them into a drawer and jotted down something in pencil on a sheet of blotting paper. 'Is that all?' he asked.

'That's all,' said the guard sullenly.

'Then you can go.'

They shambled out of the room without saluting. The door closed behind them. Massa left Bryden standing and sat down on the end of the bed with a sigh.

'What are you doing here?' he said.

He spoke as though he didn't much care; but in spite of this and all other discouragemnets Bryden's mind was too full for his tongue to be sealed by his friend's indifference. He began his story from the point at which they had parted, telling of his term in Colchester Jail, his release, his fruitless search for Massa in London, the fervid enthusiasm into which the news of the Revolution had thrown him, his attempts to reach Pergusa, the obstinacy with which they had been thwarted, and the last desperate expedient by which he

had succeeded. Then, only, Massa spoke, repeating in the same dreamy fashion the surgeon's words:

'Ah yes, the coal. I heard it had arrived.'

Then he went on irritably. 'But how did you get ashore? You had no right to land without a permit. There are laws.'

This change of attitude, so foreign to everything that he had known of Massa's nature, took Bryden's breath away. It was ridiculous that an old friend should talk like that. He, on his side, had spoken from the first as if their friendship had never been interrupted, triumphant in the consciousness of all that he had suffered to assert it. Massa's words now showed him that they were strangers—even more, that he was a prisoner standing before his judge. He made an effort to bridge the gulf by the most absolute openness. He told of his landing, stage by stage: the boatman, the truck of sulphur, the escape, the massacre in the alley. Massa sat on his bed staring up at the domed ceiling. He did not even appear to be listening. When at last Bryden spoke of the shambles in the cul-de-sac, he jumped up from his bed and made another pencil note on his strip of blotting paper.

'You say there was another?' he asked eagerly.

'Yes; and that is the first thing I want to ask you. You see, I lost sight of him when I went down. He may be lying wounded in another of your prisons. I feel a certain responsibility.'

'He had no right to land without a permit,' said Massa, like a machine. 'No foreigners—least of all English or French—are allowed in Pergusa. It's essential.'

'I quite understand what you mean. But this man is so harmless. He had nothing whatever to do with the disturbance. He simply came ashore like any other sailor after drink and a woman. It was I who helped him to do so. All I'm asking you is to send him back safely to the ship.'

'Details!' said Massa impatiently. 'Details! How can I concern myself with details. There are laws.'

'Then what will happen to him? The poor devil's as innocent as he can be.'

'Happen? I suppose he will be shot. That is the penalty.' He fumbled again in his pocket for his pencil.

Bryden flushed with anger. 'Evidently you've changed your principles,' he said. 'We've talked of this a hundred times. I thought the death penalty had been abolished.'

'Yes,' said Massa, 'that was six months ago. Everything has changed since then.' He became oratorical. 'I tell you the death penalty is essential. If you want to be rid of institutions you must destroy not only the institutions themselves but the human material that supports them.'

'So you've thrown over Marx? You're no longer a Socialist?'

Massa stared at the map of South America. 'It doesn't matter to me,' he said, 'how posterity classifies me. I use every means that is necessary to assert the power of the proletariat, even if I have to approach it over heaps of corpses or through oceans of blood. I've finished with sentiment.' He turned to Bryden. 'I've told you already I can't be bothered with details. Foreigners are dangerous to me. Whether they're Socialists or spreaders of Imperialist propaganda, it's all the same. We don't want foreigners in this country.'

He took off his hat and smoothed back the hair from his brow. He looked very pale and thin, and if Bryden had not been intent on fighting for Fisher's life, he would have felt sorry for him.

'This man at any rate can do no harm,' he said. 'He can't speak a word of the language. He's a poor devil of a fireman come ashore for a spree. Can't you take my word for him?'

'Why should I take your word?'

'Don't you know me? I've always been open with you. In the old days you knew every thought that came into my mind. I was never so frank with another living soul. And I've proved my friendship. Do you think I came to Pergusa on a pleasure-trip? You should have tried it yourself! I came here because I believed in you. I knew your ideals were mine, and I was prepared to fight for them. Isn't that good

enough for you? Doesn't that justify you in trusting me?'

Massa shook his head. 'Opinions change,' he said. 'You're honest, but you're a sentimentalist. You say you believed in me and were ready to fight for my ideals. But now you don't believe in me as much as you did. Isn't that the truth?'

'Yes, it's true,' said Bryden.

'You see!' Massa extended his hands in a gesture of despair. 'You see! Then why should I trust you? Suppose that I trusted you in something of radical importance and then you sentimentalised the issue—just as I myself saw you sentimentalise the question of Belgium in the early days of the war . . .'

'I've paid for that,' Bryden interrupted. 'I've told you how.'

'Yes. You wavered again. I suppose you wouldn't call it wavering, but that's what it was. I've no use for salvation by repentance here.'

Again he shook his head. Then, suddenly, he turned to Bryden.

'Tell me *why* you've lost faith in me?' he said abruptly. His whole face had changed. For the first time since he had spoken Bryden could imagine himself back in the days before the war when he had wholly surrendered himself to the man's charm. But he was not to be turned from his point.

'This man Fisher . . .' he began again.

Massa smiled. 'Yes, there's a certain virtue in obstinacy,' he said, seating himself at the table. 'Tell me all about him.'

Bryden described his friend as well as he could while Massa took down the details. He rang his bell, and a clerk entered to whom he handed the minute. It was addressed to the chief of police. Then he spoke to Bryden in English. 'If this man is in any of the prisons or hospitals he will be returned in safety to his ship. If he is dead we can do nothing but identify his body. Does that satisfy your conscience? I suppose it is with this uncomfortable bedfellow that we have to deal?'

'Thank you,' said Bryden.

As soon as the man had left them, Massa turned to

him again and repeated his question. 'Why have you lost faith in me.' He did not speak reproachfully nor even as if the loss of Bryden's confidence troubled him. It was just as if he found himself suddenly interested in some queer spiritual phenomenon. 'I know that I needn't ask you to be candid,' he said. 'Tell me everything as it comes to you. And sit down . . . it's a long time since we talked together.'

He had returned to his station at the end of the camp-bed where he sat facing Bryden. As he passed him he laid his hand lightly on Bryden's arm, and this gesture communicated something of his old influence, as though indeed it were a physical emanation that flowed from one body to another. Massa's touch inspired him with confidence; he felt sure of himself, and surer of his friend. He opened his heart to him, revealing without the least reserve all the doubts that had gathered round him when he lay sweating in the stench of the prison: the uneasiness with which he had watched the names of the first revolutionary leaders, those who had suffered exile with Massa and shared his doctrines, go under one by one: the growth of his belief in the newspaper stories of atrocities now encouraged by what he had seen for himself: his intense horror of despotism under whatever political name it should appear: the shock given to his ideals and hopes by the chaos in which he had found Pergusa; and its result—a sudden, instinctive craving for order, even for the old order, since any order was better than none.

Massa listened. He shook his head gravely. 'I don't dispute the facts of what you say,' he said. 'It is nearly impossible for a man of Northern blood and traditions to understand. And you are English.' His gesture implied that this was the last degree of disability.

Bryden rose to it with warmth. 'My mother was a Pergusan,' he said. 'I can't tell you how much Trinacria means to me.'

'Sentimentally . . . yes. But your English blood tells. Generations of bourgeois blood. Generations of comfort and security.'

'My father fought with the Five Hundred.'

'I know, I know. So you told me. A sentimentalist like yourself. Dangerous . . . dangerous!'

'It's so easy to sneer,' said Bryden. 'You say you've done with sentiment, but what I'm afraid you've done with is the ideal that made me—this is the bare truth—your disciple. I wonder if you realise the influence you've had on my life. That's what has brought me here now. That was what made me spend those years in prison: your preaching against the political use of force—your denial of the right to kill. You've recanted, it seems, and I'm like a convert to a mystical religion who sees its central dogmas exploded. I don't know where I am. Finally, of course, I must believe in my own intuitions, but for all that I wish you would explain yourself.'

At first Massa made no reply. He rose from his seat and paced the room slowly. Then he began to talk. It is impossible to set down the things that he said. Like many great men (and I suppose none can deny his greatness) the force by which he controlled the imagination of his followers was mainly personal. His speeches and written manifestoes as they were read abroad often seemed crude and commonplace. He had no literary gift. When he persuaded, it was not by his words but by the spirit that burned behind them. He was not even an intellectual, and for this reason the heads of the *intelligentzia* (whom he destroyed), distrusted him. Primarily he was a mystic, and his revolution was inspired by a conversion. Evil it may have been in many things, but this source gave to it a dæmonic strength that made it resemble some vast upheaval of nature rather than a change compassed by the intelligence of man. He spoke now as he walked to and fro, an unimpressive figure but for his swift, suddenly piercing eyes, and the restless hands that seemed to mould the clumsy words which he spoke into compelling form. Now, as always, Bryden listened to him in a state that was half hypnotic, unaware of the man's physical presence, unaware of the sound of his voice. His mind was as remote from his surroundings as if it had been inhabiting the enchanting background of the Madonna's picture. And at first,

strangely enough, his imagination was scarcely stirred at all.

He heard Massa talking of the doctrines that they had absorbed and amplified in their London days, and above all of the teachings of Marx whose avowed disciples they had been. He admitted that he had come to Pergusa a Marxist, one of a small band of social-democratic agitators. But when the time for action came—as come it did with the suddenness of Mediterranean thunder—he had seen that the doctrines of Marx were useless weapons in his hand. 'What is the Marxist Revolution,' he said, 'but the logical outcome of a highly, perniciously developed industrial state: the revolution of men against machines that have made them slaves?' And what was Trinacria? Industrially it was the most backward state in Europe. It had never, thank Heaven, been caught up into the feverish race of mechanical production that would have made its units no better than machines themselves. The destiny of the Trinacrian was that of shepherd and the husbandman. Providence, for lack of a better word, had denied the country the possession of coal and of the heat and filth that coal produces. For this reason it was a misfortune that the theories of revolution current among the banished Trinacrian politicians, such as those of Marx himself, had been developed in industrial countries. Of such were the theories that still bothered Bryden's head.

'In a moment I saw that they were of no use to me. In a day I threw them overboard . . . scrapped them. I saw that the men who had held them—good men, honest men, comrades—were blind, and therefore dangerous. I destroyed them. It is probable that if you had been here you would have gone with them. If I had not destroyed them they would have forced on the country an exotic revolution, a growth unsuited to the Trinacrian soil. It would have withered away. And what are a few lives compared with the happiness of millions?'

He threw wide his hands in an appeal, but Bryden saw that the appeal was not intended for him, and was silent.

'I saw,' Massa continued, 'that I could not make the people fight for an abstract ideal, such as liberty, that they had never known and therefore never valued. All that they would fight for were the things that they already possessed—little enough, God knows! I gave them a possession to fight for. I gave them the land that had been theirs by right of labour for five hundred years. I told them to take what was their own. You, no doubt, would have educated them up to it, allowed them to acquire it by purchase or the pressure of political power! People who have lived under an agricultural tyranny for centuries have no time for politics, no money for purchase. Well, they took their land in a primitive way. It was a bloody and a terrible time; but what could you expect? They had been taught for long enough that they were barbarians, and they proved it on the bodies and houses of their teachers. A people that had been manacled with iron customs suddenly, bewilderingly released! Do you wonder that they abused their strength? A hundred years of teaching could not have formed in these people the will to make themselves free by law. They won their freedom in three weeks of anarchy. Now they will keep it. It is done.

'But when that was done my own work began. If the destruction that I unloosed had been allowed to work itself out, reaction might had stolen from the people everything that they had gained. Even if I made my name hated for ever, even if I sacrificed my life, I had to act. I freed my hands. I made myself Dictator. I established my strength on a mercenary basis that your theorists would consider damnable. I bought loyalty in any market. To the terror of liberation I added a terror of repression. Ruthlessly. You have read all about it in your papers. 'A mockery of liberty' they call it, and they are quite right. It is a phase that must take its course and pass. An enslaved people such as ours feels lost unless it is aware of the weight of some pressure from above—as lost as you would feel if the force of gravity were suddenly removed from under you. In every country, too, there are a number of people who can only enjoy liberty at the

expense of their neighbours. Here we have plenty of these. In the provinces disorders are nearly over, but in Pergusa, where the population is mixed and degraded by the beginnings of industrial life, violence persists. I meet it with machine-guns. You yourself saw something of my remedies last night. Here the corrective terror is not over. I pray for the day when it will be, but till that day comes I must use my only weapon—the fear of death.

'I know what you will say . . . you'll say that these people have shown by their excesses that they were not ripe for revolution, and if by that you mean the industrial type of revolution of which we used to talk, you're right. But our people are different from any other. Even under the yoke of the landowners their private life was curiously near to communal ideals. The unit is the commune—the very word! They haven't, thank heaven, the sense of nationality that lays them open to infection with an imperialist virus. Every community, in its social relations, is a law unto itself. The village is the unit. Even an anachronism like the customs-house on the boundary of each village is a symbol of the communal state in its most elementary form. In the gathering of their vines and olives, in the reaping of their corn you will see the same spirit. The men and women of one family help those of another. There's a tradition of help, and that to me is beautiful. There lies happiness. Happiness! What else should I wish to give them?'

He paused. 'I am a lonely man,' he said, 'and have never been lonelier than I am now; but it is in loneliness that the greatest revelations come. Mine came to me in a strange way. When the noise of the war and your persecution of all foreigners drove me out of England, I worked my way back to Trinacria under a new name. I hid myself in one of the walled hill towns above Pergusa. I stepped straight out of the fever of London into a life that was two or three thousand years old or even older. At first its quietness made me dizzy. I couldn't accept it, for my soul was in a turmoil with the bitterness of exile and the pity of war, but gradually peace settled down on me.

One morning I woke in a mood of expectation. It was in early March. I stepped out before dawn on to a hill-side that I knew well. It was scattered with anemones and asphodel and yellow bosses of spurge, but you couldn't see them, and a nightingale, coming in tired from Africa, was chuckling in a bush of myrtle. Very still . . . like a moment in which something is born. I held my breath—I didn't dare to breathe, and then the light came welling out of the east; the light broke in my heart like waves. The hills unfolded themselves. Colour came. It was the season of the almond leaf and young corn. I trembled with their greenness. I could not see it for tears; I had thought the world was too old for such a piercing green. I sat there till the sun leapt over the mountain and lit the fields. A flock of sheep moved past me with dew on their fleeces, feeding as they went, so near that I could smell the thyme that they nibbled, and a man on horseback followed with a peaked woollen hood pulled over his head. I didn't know where I was: time and place left me. I seemed to be living in the beginnings of the world before men had marred it with their eagerness. A lost world . . . I can't explain. It was the sort of thing that comes to you in Greek poetry: a glittering peace, a sense of eternal spring. I was overwhelmed with shame and pity and a desire to find what had been lost. I saw in a flash my own madness, in all the years I had wasted in planning how to patch up the machinery of civilisation. Something inside me cried: 'Make an end of it! Make an end of it! Destroy! This is the moment!'

'Afterwards I saw that what I had told myself was true. It was the moment. The terrible, blessed thing that you and I have seen is the end of Europe. Till that moment I had been one of the social quacks that clustered round her death-bed with their twopenny halfpenny panaceas. For two thousand years she's been sick with the civilisation which Rome gave her, swollen and boastful with the greed of power, but sick. . . . sick! Let her die, for beneath her bricks she's as barren as the Sahara already. She's on a side track of evolution that's forced mankind in a blind alley. The

ideals of power and happiness are incompatible. Let us cut our losses. What is two thousand years in the history of a star?

'But where to begin? Where is the future? There's not a continent where the poison hasn't spread, for though men find new countries they carry their diseases with them. Even the East rises out of its stupor to clutch at the civilisation of which Europe lies dying. The star's too small. I'll tell you. This is the only place where time has stood still, the only country with a tradition of continuity, civilised life as it began before the Romans diverted its course with their swords. They say that we've slept; that the south is dead. It sleeps, but it is still alive, and in the gloom that has gathered over Europe it shows the only light. The land of lost content! She lies waiting; her pulses quicken; the old life wakens!'

He stopped. The room was stifling with heat, for the sirocco had fallen and a lifeless air drooped on the city. Massa wiped the sweat from his forehead and opened the window. It stood so high that Bryden could see nothing of the stifled city beneath them, only the bulk of sleeping mountains and a sky thick with stars. Massa stood there in silence staring out over the land as though his eyes would dispel the darkness and re-create his vision. Bryden, curiously moved, came to his side. Below them in the shadowy gardens a nocturnal cicala fizzed like an electric spark, then switched off with a snap of its wings. Neither of them spoke, but when Massa turned he was himself again.

'It's foolish to stand at the window,' he said. 'They're always on the watch. A rifle shot: the whole thing ended, and all the other political quacks delighted! You see what I am. I'm a force of destruction. I'm like Attila—the scourge of God. I don't believe in Gods, but I *do* believe in man.' He shut the window.

'Well, it's been good to talk to you,' he said. 'Talking is my vice. Nowadays I have to suppress it, and suppressions, as your scientific quacks tell you, are dangerous.' He laughed, and then, in a more business-like tone said: 'To-morrow I will arrange for your return to the ship.'

3

This announcement took Bryden's breath away, recalling him to Cardiff at the very moment of conversion when he pictured himself setting up house in Utopia. He begged Massa to let him stay, assured him that his beliefs were stronger than ever—as indeed they were whenever the Dictator had him to himself—protested his willingness to do any kind of work and to face any danger. 'I didn't come here lightly,' he said. 'After all it was one of the biggest decisions of my life. Give me credit for that. And if we see things in the same way . . .'

Massa stared at him moodily. 'You're too well educated,' he said. 'You've been taught to think in terms of construction. You'll be hankering after commissions of inquiry and statistics of infantile mortality and all the other patent medicines. The sacred word "Progress" is engraved on your heart. You can't forget what you've learned. No, no.'

'Isn't there any place in the new state for a man of intelligence?'

'Intelligence, yes; but learning, no. And it's impossible to find the first without a smattering of the second.'

'Any work . . .' Bryden persisted. 'Give me a rifle. I want to feel that I'm not out of it, that I'm doing something to help. It's very largely a personal matter. I don't dissociate your theories from you. You say that there is work for intelligence, and I'm not altogether a fool.'

'There is one thing in which you might be useful,' said Massa, slowly, and that is espionage.' He saw Bryden flush slightly. 'Look! You're offended already. Shall we call it Secret Service?'

Bryden pulled himself together. 'I'll do whatever you order,' he said.

'Very well. You shall have your orders. I think I have made a mistake. It would probably have been better for both of us if I hadn't seen you, if I'd taken

no notice of your letter. Then you'd have been shot in the ordinary way . . . and no more trouble. I shouldn't allow myself the weakness of having a friend,' he continued with a smile, 'but the thing is done, and it has been a great joy to see you.' He took Bryden's hand in his and clasped it. 'Now I must leave you for an hour or two. I will send you clothes and a barber, and if you're wise you'll rest on my bed. When I come back we will take some food together and after that I will tell you what I want you to do.' He pressed Bryden's hand affectionately and left him.

Bryden opened the window, switched off the light, and threw himself on Massa's bed. His body was too tired to let him sleep, and the darkness stimulated his brain to dwell on Massa's words. He found it difficult to think clearly, partly from sheer fatigue, and partly because he felt it his duty to divert his thoughts from the channels in which they had run. There was something curiously fascinating to a mind harassed and numbed by the immense pressure of war in the idea of writing off the whole complexity of civilisation as a bad debt, and starting again with a clean sheet. His was a personal conversion, but the quality in Massa's theories that appealed to him and reinforced the appeals of that unique personality was their simplicity, and it is true that in no period of the world's history could they have been accepted so readily as in this age of acute weariness when faith and energy alike had failed. It seemed to Bryden as though he had been offered a complete solution of all the social evils of his time, and however violent and bloody the way to its realisation might be, he knew that it could not compare in horror with one year of European war.

By the time that the barber appeared, the heat and his own exhaustion had made him drowsy. He roused himself with difficulty and submitted to the attentions of as great a ruffian as he had ever seen, a dirty, misshapen creature who looked as if he would as soon cut his throat as shave him. Ten minutes later a suit of clothes arrived. He laughed as he put them on, for he had a severe taste in tailoring, holding the English theory that no artist under any circumstances must

look like one, while the garments that Massa had sent him were of the kind that are worn on the stage by the characters in *La Bohême*, complete to a slouch hat of black felt, and the most extravagant of ties. He stripped before Massa's Spartan washing-bowl and cleaned himself as well as the want of soap and a towel like a lady's handkerchief would allow him. Then he dressed and lay down again, thrilled by the luxury of clean linen.

A little later the fat guard from the corridor brought in a tray of food and a bottle of wine, staring at Bryden as if he wondered whether he had passed him in his sleep. Then Massa arrived, brisk and rejuvenated, and examined him with a twinkle in his eyes. 'Excellent, excellent!' he said.

'For Montmarte?' Bryden asked.

'Aren't you an artist? To-morrow we must get you the implements of your trade. I want you to paint a picture in your spare time. You will enjoy yourself. I have already made inquiries about a studio, and I think I've found one. It should be sufficiently romantic to suit you, for it's in the Street of Palaces.'

The words recalled to Bryden his ghostly experience of the night before. He remembered it with a shiver, but Massa gave him no time to think, calling him to the table on which the food had been set.

'We'll talk business later,' he said. Indeed he was brighter and less preoccupied than Bryden had ever known him, drinking more wine than was usual with him and talking of old Rufo, of the Café Pergusa, and of the waiters with whom he had slept in his Leman Street garret.

'There was a lady, too,' he said, with a smile. 'A Pergusan . . .'

Bryden shook his head. 'That's all over,' he said. 'You may take it that I'm quite cured.'

'I'm glad to hear it, and I hope it's true. A secret agent—you see I'm being polite—should keep clear of women.'

Bryden told him of the shock that his mistaken discovery of Carmela in the Place of the People had given him; but by this time they had finished their

meal and Massa was on his feet again, waiting impatiently for the table to be cleared. The fat man entered and took away the tray, and Massa began to unfold his plans at once.

'The thing I want you to do,' he said, 'is important and not, I'm glad to say, dangerous. You'll realise that the present phase of the Revolution is the most difficult of all. The first shock of it is over, the country districts are quiet and the cities are gradually losing the excitement that carried them away at first; people are beginning to wake up so that they now realise the unpleasantness of a state of siege without visualising the benefits that will come to them later. It's natural enough. In a state of excitement people will put up with anything, but privation and despotism are not borne so easily in cold blood. It's a point at which the momentum has slackened, a dead period in which reaction is welcomed. That is what I have to guard against, and that is where you are going to help me. There is a household in the Street of Palaces in which I am interested. I believe it to be the centre of a dynastic movement, but it is extremely difficult to get information about it by ordinary means.'

'But surely,' Bryden protested, 'you can clear the whole matter up in the simplest way by arresting them? I can't imagine your feeling any scruples in a case of that kind.'

'Scruples? No. But I'm not so foolish as to be precipitate. They are the kind of people whom one might torture without producing a word of confession. Nor are they corruptible. What I want is information. If there is such a thing as a plot I want to know the names of those who are concerned in it, not to destroy my source of evidence. I want to encourage them up to a point. I don't act till I know all that is to be known. Then you will see if I have any scruples!

'These people are living in the Palazzo Leonforte. It's one of the oldest and most beautiful in the street, and will appeal to your artistic sense, no doubt. The family, who go by the name of Farace, seem inoffensive enough. There's a mother, a foolish woman as far as I can hear; a son, who's a bit of a waster, and a daughter,

reputed to be beautiful. They're easily frightened, and if you knew anything of our Trinacrian aristocracy, you'd realise that they aren't easy to approach. The mother never leaves the house. The son, who drinks more than is good for him, occasionally talks the kind of treason that would bring him face to face with a firing party if I hadn't still hopes of his being useful; but he, as much as any of the others, is incorruptible. By any standards but my own these people have their virtues. The daughter is by way of being an artist. I mean she paints pictures and occasionally sells them. I suppose, unless they have any jewels left, that is how they live. And that is where you come in.

'To begin with, you're a painter, and look like one for the first time in your life. You are going to find a studio on the floor above, and it will be your business to get in touch with the daughter. If you were a Trinacrian this would be impossible. She'd want to know your pedigree and your politics for six generations. Providentially you're an Englishman—you can call yourself by any name you like but your own, for they wouldn't touch you if they'd seen it on a bottle. The English, as you know, are supposed to be the only monarchists left in Europe, so you start with everything in your favour. You're a poor devil of a painter, preferably connected with one of the lesser houses of nobility, who happened to get stranded in the south at the time of the Revolution and has not been able to leave the country. The reason that you aren't in prison like the rest of them is that you've kept on the move, speaking excellent Trinacrian, and you've only come to Pergusa because you feel safer and less conspicuous in a city. Naturally you regard the Revolution, and me in particular, with horror. Your one passion, apart from painting, is aristocracy. Go gently. Don't make too much of it at first. Act as if you yourself weren't sure of your company and couldn't trust them not to denounce you; but be clumsy enough to let them see, all the time, what your opinions are. Then, little by little, you'll be able to let slip hints of your monarchical faith. Encourage them, without letting them know that this is what you are doing.'

'My job, in fact,' said Bryden, 'is that of an *agent provocateur*?'

'Exactly. You don't like it?'

'I shall do what you tell me. That's the condition I've accepted.'

'Very good. But that is not all I have to tell you. The person in whom I am most interested is not a member of the Farace family, but one who often visits them. He has never been seen by my agents; but his voice has been heard, and I think it is possible that he is sheltering somewhere in the house. I have strong suspicions of his identity, but that is all I can say. Nothing but a raid would clear the matter up, and, as I've told you, I do not want to destroy my source of information. That is the most important part of your work. I wish you luck.'

He held out his hand to Bryden. 'I'm not sure that I've not done something incredibly foolish,' he said with a smile. 'I cannot afford to have friends.'

Bryden took his hand in silence. The moment was so definitely emotional that Massa snapped its tenseness with a joke: 'And don't fall in love again. That is my last advice.'

Bryden shook his head: 'No, no, you may be sure of that,' and they passed on to Massa's arrangements for his immediate future. A room had been taken for Bryden in a third-rate hotel, the Bristol, half-way between the centre of the city and the port.

'The district is reasonably quiet,' he said, 'and I expect you'll sleep more comfortably than you did last night. Here are your papers. There is nothing on them to show that you are a servant of the State, so you had better keep clear of the police. I have not filled in your name.'

'On the ship I called myself Robert Blake. I should think that will do.'

'Very well. Robert Blake it shall be. You have money?'

'I had. It's in your pocket.'

They laughed together over Massa's thoughtlessness.

'Now you had better go,' he said at last. 'Your stock in trade shall be sent to the hotel where you can stay

until you find your studio. Let it be known in the Street of Palaces that you are looking for one, and do not decide on the Palazzo Leonforte till you have nearly settled to take another. You can communicate with me through your hotel-keeper, who is a good servant of mine. Address your letters to me under the name of our old friend Rufo. Sleep well, for to-morrow you'll have to be wideawake. I will let you know, by a message at the hotel, what happens to your friend.'

The fat man in the corridor showed Bryden downstairs to a door which opened into the gardens beneath Massa's window.

The Fourth Chapter

THE PALACE

I

NEXT morning the landlord of the Hotel Bristol, a man of immense bulk who sat in the corner of his office like a sleepy tarantula, handed Bryden a note addressed to him by Massa in the name of Blake. 'Your friend is safe,' it said: 'I have sent him back to his ship.' A wave of thankfulness flooded Bryden's mind. All night the uncertainty of Fisher's fate had weighed on him. Now, for the first time, he felt free to act.

For four days the sirocco blew steadily during the daytime and dropped at night into a suffocating calm as though exhausted with its own hot violence, and throughout this distressing period Bryden was performing the elaborate feints and skirmishes that Massa had advised. In a city such as Pergusa, an artist in search of a studio should scarcely have become a public figure; but Pergusa, being little interested in the life of the world outside it, has time to concentrate on that within its gates, and Bryden had no sooner advertised in the single sheet that now represented the Trinacrian press, than he began to be conspicuous. Sitting, exhausted after his first day's hunting, on a café terrace reading replies to his advertisement, he was amazed to find himself accosted by a tout, whom he could spot at a hundred yards as a vender of indecent post cards, and asked if he were the Englishman who wanted a studio. This gentleman, with a hair-raising imitation of English as it is spoken in Newhaven, Connecticut, offered him not only a studio but a selection of female models whose points he described in detail. When Bryden, in the Pergusan of Carmela at her richest, told him to go to hell, he gave a jump. No doubt the

experience was unnerving, for it suggested that during the Revolution he had lost the powers of diagnosing nationality on which he lived.

Wherever Bryden went he found himself followed by curious eyes. No doubt Massa had rather over-dressed him for his part, but, even if this had not been so, every reader of the new sheet in which advertisements, on account of their enormous costliness, were few, had by this time read and re-read the intelligence that an English artist wanted a studio in the Street of Palaces, and set himself subconsciously to identify the advertiser.

A man who could afford to advertise in the newspaper was obviously made of money, and when Bryden began his round of inspection, he found that the Pergusan householders meant to get their share of it. In the first three days of his search he visited no less than six apartments that were offered him—on fabulous terms—in the quarter that he desired, and though this brought him no nearer to his definite object, it made him very familiar with the Street of Palaces. By daylight its tremendous façades lost a good deal of the impressiveness that had affected him so deeply on the night of his arrival. He began to know those amazing fronts for the dead shells that they were, and behind them discovered a swarming life that reminded him of nothing so much as that of vermin infesting a piece of ancient and beautiful furniture. Most of the palaces, from which his imagination had pictured high-born men and women being dragged out to butchery, had passed out of the hands of their original owners more than fifty years before and had degenerated into tenements. The great salons of their *piani nobili* had been divided by partitions into small ill-lighted chambers from which naked children emerged to stare at him as he passed, and this condition, if it filled him with a physical nausea, was less disturbing to his spirit than the picture of a hollow and ghostly desertion.

In all the houses that he visited Bryden found nothing that could reasonably be converted into a studio, but in every case he made it his duty to be impressed by the excellence of the rooms and the enormity of the

price, behaving like a bargainer who is not quite clever enough to conceal his anxiety to come to terms, and leaving behind him the impression that in a few days he was likely to return and take thankfully what he could get. It amused him to find that after the first day's inspection everybody knew him, and to be told who he was and what he wanted before he had announced the reasons for his visit. All this, he reflected, was to the good. Better be a nine days' wonder than an intriguing mystery. By the time that he had visited his sixth apartment the children no longer stared at him.

Only one thing troubled him, and this was that the proprietor of the Palazzo Leonforte, whoever he or she might be, had evidently not seen his advertisement. He knew definitely from Massa that the house contained a studio to let, but he had counted on the overtures coming from the owner's side, and dared not venture anything so definite as an inquiry on his own for fear of arousing suspicion. Four days passed. By this time he was already in treaty for five apartments that he had no intention of occupying, and the bulk of the rents demanded for them was melting away like snow in summer. If he waited much longer he felt that he would be entreated to take all five for nothing. Every day he called for his letters at the newspaper offices, but still the Palazzo Leonforte was silent.

He wondered how this might be explained. Of course, it was possible that the landlord did not read the newspaper; but Pergusa is not dependent on print for its news, and it was inconceivable that anybody living in that street should be ignorant of his quest. Whoever these people might be it was therefore certain that they lived a very isolated life; and indeed the whole appearance of the palace confirmed this supposition. Each day Bryden studied it closely, but never once did he see any living person issue from its enormous doors. The palace was certainly one of the most beautiful in the street, standing alone between two narrow *vicoli* that showed the inevitable proportions of its four stories by detaching the house from its neighbours. It was strange that a building of such severe design, and one that showed so few appearances of life should seem desirable as a place to live in.

Perhaps the secret of the charm that it already exercised on Bryden's mind lay in the simplicity of its decoration, the perfect appropriateness of the wrought-iron balconies and the huge bronze gates above which a single carved scroll displayed the shield, long since defaced, of the family who had built it. One felt, in gazing at it, that its interior had surely not been debased like those of its neighbours, that even if it were deserted one might expect to find within it the peculiar graciousness of a leisured age, the very qualities, in fact, with which Bryden's disillusioned imagination had invested the other palaces of the street. To add to its attractions the back of it was protected by a garden lost within high walls, a retreat of unimaginably cool security that was tempting to those who glimpsed it from the hot street. Once, daring more than was usual, Bryden had crossed the road and peered through the bronze doors across the marble-flagged *cortile* to another archway that showed him, beyond its shadows, the shape of a stone fountain and the fresh vision of a lemon-tree in fruit. So much, for the present, was all that he dared to see.

At last he gave up waiting. One day when he was passing the gates for the hundredth time, he noticed with surprise that they had been left open, and, taking his courage in both hands, entered the courtyard. On the right a scale of marble steps invited him to ascend. They were very clean; their whiteness was as pure as if they had only been quarried a few years. He hurried up them, and on the landing of the first floor found himself face to face with a small, determined woman who had once been beautiful. She moved toward him with a broom as though she would sweep him downstairs again.

'How did you get in?' she gasped. 'How did you get in?'

He didn't answer her. 'This is the Palazzo Vico?' he asked politely.

'Indeed no. This is the Palazzo Leonforte,' she replied, still edging him toward the head of the stairs.

'There must be some mistake,' said Bryden. 'I was told definitely that this was the Palazzo Vico.'

'Do not I know the name of my own house? Your excellency will do me the pleasure of descending.'

A superior woman, very polite, but evidently determined to get rid of him as soon as possible.

'One moment,' said Bryden, referring to an imaginary note. 'The third on the left . . . bronze doors . . . stands by itself. Either I am mad, signora, or this is your letter. You have offered me a studio in reply to this advertisement. *An English artist desires a studio in the neighbourhood of the Street of Palaces. Is prepared to pay a substantial rent.* But of course I am wrong. It is obvious you must know the name of your own house. If this is not the Palazzo Vico, pray tell me what it is called.'

'Palazzo Leonforte.'

'Ah, Leonforte. Then perhaps you can direct me to the Palazzo Vico? If that is not troubling you too much?'

He had handed her the cutting of his advertisement, and she stood there reading it over word by word. He saw her wavering.

'Are you particularly anxious to find a studio in the Palazzo Vico?' she said.

'I had set my heart on it,' said Bryden.

'I think you, as an artist, would find it noisy,' she said. 'It is let in tenements and there must be twenty families of children in it.'

'But I am devoted to children,' Bryden protested.

'That is natural. Perhaps you have them of your own? All the same, I should like you to permit me to show you a studio that is to let in this house. It is a true studio. Before the Revolution it was occupied by an American.'

'Ah, this cursed Revolution!' Bryden sighed. 'If it were not for that I should now be in England.'

He congratulated himself on having achieved a proportion of truth in his first conscious dissimulation. The woman did not turn a hair, and he admired her for it.

'Modern life is very difficult,' she said. 'Will you then see my studio?'

'If afterwards you will direct me to the Palazzo Vico I shall be delighted,' he said.

She showed him the way and he followed her along the length of a glazed corridor overlooking the courtyard and up a smaller flight of stairs, which also she explained led downward to the ground floor, so that the occupier of the studio need suffer no interference from those of the *piano nobile.*'

'That is an advantage,' Bryden agreed.

Rather out of breath she threw wide a pair of double doors, and ushered him into a room that had evidently been chosen and furnished with care by a man who understood what a painter wants. The previous tenant —his name was Messiter, and the *padrona* seemed surprised that Bryden, who spoke the same language, didn't know it—had fitted it up at his own expense. Of course money was nothing to an American. Nothing. Incidentally, as Bryden soon saw, he had made a mess of his alterations by uniting the two oblong northern windows in a single big one, domed with an ugly fanlight. For this monstrosity the beautiful proportions and the moulded ceiling of the long room somewhat atoned. A sectional bookcase of the kind that is seen in modern offices revealed the literary taste that might have been expected in the window's designer. Indeed this was not the only trace of Mr Messiter's occupation that he had left behind him. Bryden imagined that he must have left in a hurry.

'Yes,' he was assured, 'the noise of the machine-guns checked his inspiration. Nothing else would have induced him to leave.'

Bryden scarcely listened to the woman's explanations. He was examining the room from a strategic point of view, wondering how it lay in regard to the distribution of the family beneath. He stood at the window, thinking. However ugly Mr Messiter's north light may have been, the prospect that it disclosed was fascinating. Below, it commanded a complete foreshortened view of the sequestered garden square, sunk in its four walls like the cool bottom of a well, and over the roofs on his own level Bryden could see a line of mountain that ravished him with its clear-cut beauty and a burning strip of sea. As a matter of fact, without knowing it, he had fallen in love with the palace from the first. It stimulated

him. For the first time since he had lost Carmela he began to feel an over-powering impulse to work. Yes . . . what things he would paint!

'Does the studio please you?' the woman inquired, a little eagerly.

'Please me?' Bryden awoke from his dream. 'Yes. It is so-so . . . not exactly what I would have chosen. One point that you mentioned returns to me. You say that the Palazzo Vico would be noisy. How can I be sure that this will be quieter?'

'The walls are thick. See! One hears nothing.'

'But there are people below?' She looked frightened. 'I think you said so.'

'You may be certain that they are most tranquil.'

'A family with children?'

'Indeed no. Three people, all of a serious age.'

'And that is all. It sounds impossible.'

'Apart from myself, who live below.'

'Then the palace must be nearly empty? That does not sound well. Tell me frankly what is wrong with it.'

The *padrona* threw out her hands, emitting the little choking sound with which the Pergusans indicate despair. The place was empty, she said, because since the death of her husband, she preferred privacy. Mr Messiter, she assured him, had always been comfortable. He had declared that the light was the best he had ever painted by. In the room below the light was also excellent for painting.

'If your tenant is a painter I might ask his opinion. It is quite easy, for I imagine the door we passed below was that of his studio.'

The woman covered her admission at once. He was quite mistaken in supposing that the other tenant was a professional artist. She, at any rate, had never said anything of the sort. He changed the subject, almost too violently for prudence, to that of terms, and in this she allowed herself to show a perfectly natural anxiety to keep him as a tenant.

'But we need hardly speak of this,' he said, 'till I have seen the Palazzo Vico.'

She clasped her hands in despair. Evidently she, or

some one connected with her, was in want of money. She named a sum that was less than moderate.

'On those terms I am tempted to take the studio if I may also have one bedroom. Those you haven't shown me,' he reminded her. As he spoke he saw himself isolated on the higher floor and added quickly: 'That is provided I may have the use of the garden—on a hot day such as this, for example.

'The garden?' she said, alarmed at this unexpected encroachment. 'I don't know. I must ask . . . I must ask.'

'But surely the garden also is yours?'

'Yes, yes,' she said, 'but I should not like to incommode my older tenants. You understand?'

'Then perhaps you will ask them now?'

'You will wait here?' she almost entreated.

'Certainly.'

She left him, scuttling downstairs softly in her heelless, rope-soled shoes. He would have given anything to listen to the colloquy beneath, but prudence restrained him and he contented himself with examining the magazines in the last tenant's bookcase, among which he unearthed a deplorable water-colour of the fountain in the garden, and its sheltering lemon-trees and acacias. A moment later the woman returned breathless. If he would take the place for six months he could use the garden . . . on hot days. She hoped that would satisfy him. Even now he could see that she was feverishly anxious about this admission, and that a genuine need of money and a strong protective instinct were dividing her mind. Whoever she were, the Farace family had a landlady whom it would be difficult to corrupt. Who could she be? An old servant . . . a peasant from one of their forfeited estates? Once she had been beautiful. Even now there was a curious dignity about her face that suggested the people of the interior rather than Pergusa. She blushed as he looked at her, and murmured something about references.

'But I don't know a soul in Pergusa!' he protested.

She gave a gasp of evident relief. Then another fear struck her.

'You are a foreigner,' she said. 'Understand that I

do not object to foreigners, but I want to know that your papers are in order. You are not likely to be visited by the police? I couldn't risk that.'

'Risk it?'

'You see, I am a woman alone, and naturally timid. You can guess that I should not like the house to be brought into prominence.'

'My papers,' he said, 'are issued by one of the prefects of the South. They have been visaed by the police here, so you need not be troubled.'

Again she hesitated and, divining her thoughts, Bryden offered her a month's rent in advance. She took it greedily.

As they moved downstairs he made as if he would turn along the corridor that ran the length of the floor beneath. She took hold of his arm. 'This is the way,' she said. 'In future you will be able to use your own staircase. That will ensure your privacy. Also it will be most convenient for the garden.'

He thanked her, and all he saw of the lower story was the double door of the studio. Inside it he heard voices. The *padrona* hurried him past.

2

Within three days Bryden settled into his new quarters. He had to do most of the work of establishment himself, for the landlady, once having grasped his month's rent, appeared to lose interest in him. To make the studio habitable and even beautiful was merely a matter of purging it of Messiter's rubbish, and this alone kept him busy over the best part of a week, for the departed American had had a way of insinuating traces of his aggressive personality into every corner of the apartment, though the only article of any value that he had left behind was a palette knife with which, in an inspired moment, he had contrived to wedge one of the legs of a toppling table.

In the ordinary way he had arranged to take his meals in a small restaurant, not unlike his old haunt in Soho, that stood in the least conspicuous corner of

the Central Square, but while he was busy with his spring-cleaning he used to make his lunch of mottled red sausage, a hunk of the sour branny substance that the Pergusans had already christened Blockade Bread, and a bottle of wine. He would sit at his window eating it; for at that time of day this side of the house was in shade, and while he ate he would amuse himself by skimming the pages of Messiter's American magazines, particularly the advertisements of labour-saving household appliances so persuasively worded that he could scarcely resist the temptation of doing as they requested and mailing them his order right then.

He sat at his window, relatively cool, but drowsy with the rich sunlight that surrounded him, reducing the many-coloured roofs of Pergusa to one unpaintable hue of quivering light, and listened to the cries of the hawkers and the singing of women in the narrow streets below. The light so hypnotised him, and the sounds came to him from such a clear, faint distance that he seemed to have no place in the world to which they belonged. This sense of detachment grew upon him; he seemed so definitely 'out of it,' in that high and pleasant studio, ready, and always more ready, to slip into the typically Pergusan mood of contemplating the present moment to the exclusion of everything else. Gazing down into the sunlit depths of the garden he sometimes saw a lizard move with jerks across the marbled flags. 'I am like a hawk hovering in the sun,' he thought, 'waiting for the moment to swoop'; and for many minutes at a time his imagination hung airily poised above this ridiculous prey, so that he had to pull himself together to prevent himself swooping in fact from sheer listlessness.

He decided to drink no more wine at midday, and determined to start work on a picture at once; but even though these resolutions restored his self-respect they couldn't disguise the fact that he hadn't come to Pergusa to paint pictures in a palatial studio. Beneath the drowsy summer life that moved through the streets with a sort of resigned monotony, he knew that the fierce political struggle still went on. Every day the paper told him of fighting, of arrests, of executions. Up in that lonely

room at San Constanzo, Massa was struggling with every fibre in his lean body and every cell in his brain while he, Bryden, lay inert under the heavy suns of August.

A whole week had passed and as yet he had nothing to report. It was true that Massa had told him to go gently, but that was not the same as telling him to go to sleep. He fought in vain against a paralysing drowsiness, racking an arid, sun-dried brain for any vestige of a plan of campaign, sitting blankly in front of his new canvas waiting for the inspiration that he had imagined to be so near. His futility preyed on his imagination. He wished to God that Massa had given him a rifle, and set him to some kind of work in which a man could tire himself out without thinking.

At last he whipped himself into a sort of activity. He set himself the task of working his way into the confidence of the *padrona*, approaching her in the character of an amiable fool who would rather gossip in a basement kitchen than nowhere. He affected an interest in the Pergusan dialect; but she told him, as he had already suspected, that she was not Pergusan. He watched her cooking in the sweet aroma of olive-twigs and charcoal, questioned her about the dishes that she made, hoping, in this way, to approach the subject of the family for whom she was preparing them. On every other matter she met him with a kind of bored tolerance, but as soon as he touched even so lightly the subject of the people on the *piano nobile* she became impenetrable. She could not have shown her anxiety to conceal more clumsily. He rallied her on it.

'It's a good thing,' he said, 'that I am not an agent of the police, or I should certainly suspect that you were concealing something about them.'

She went very red and fanned her *fornello* violently.

'That is ludicrous,' she said. 'Why do you ask me questions?'

'Why shouldn't I be a little curious about my nearest neighbours. I don't even know their names. Is that a secret?'

The poor woman hastened to reassure him.

'There are no secrets in this house. Everything is

open. The name of the family is Farace. So now you know.'

'Thank you for telling me. At last I shall cease wondering.'

'There's nothing to wonder about,' she cried pathetically.

'I think you said there were four of them?'

'Four? No, no! Three only. A mother, a son, and a daughter.'

'And the son paints?'

'That is where you are wrong. It is the daughter who paints.'

'Can you tell me her name?'

'Why not? The son is called Carlo, the daughter Maddalena.'

'A beautiful name! Tell me, is she beautiful, too?'

The *padrona's* enthusiasm got the better of her. 'Beautiful? You should see her!'

'I should like nothing better. 'If I might present my compliments . . .'

'Impossible. That is not customary.'

'Surely the desire is natural. I know nobody in Pergusa.'

'It is much better so in these days. It is safer to know nobody.'

By this time she had recovered from her fright, and, try as he would, Bryden could get no further. Meanwhile the disadvantages of his studio as an observation post were growing on him. The walls, as the *padrona* had proudly assured him, were so excellently built that no sound penetrated them. The only voices that he ever heard from the room below came to him from the windows beneath his own North light, and this happened so seldom that he doubted if the room were often in use. He racked his brain to find excuses for waiting on the stairs outside the door, but even apart from the sense of humiliation which such a positive act of eavesdropping gave him, he found that nothing was to be gained by this. He had hoped also, in the beginning, that their common use of the garden might some day force a meeting that he could turn to account, but though he watched it from his window often enough

during the heat of the day he never saw so much as a shadow enter it from the floor below. It became clear at last that of his own intention he could effect nothing, and he consoled himself with the thought that at any rate his presence must be growing familiar, and that when once they became unconscious of it, his victims were likely to relax their caution.

Luckily the heat was broken by a night of terrific thunderstorms, so violent that they seemed to threaten the destruction of the whole city, and he was able to set to work next day on the picture that he had planned in the stokehold of the *Boston Hall*. The abstraction of creative activity freed him a little from the unrest into which his idleness had thrown him. He painted religiously in the early morning and evening. The picture grew, and he was lost in it, recapturing, curiously enough, something of the atmosphere of his early days with Carmela. No setting could have been more different from that of his little room in Chelsea than this huge studio. Perhaps he recalled Carmela because his ears were becoming accustomed to the soft sounds of the Pergusan speech, which he had heard constantly in no other period of his life but that of their passionate isolation. The thought of her no longer troubled him, but it was always with him when he stood before his easel. He acknowledged her importance in the shaping of his destiny. If he had not loved her he would probably never have met Massa. If he had not been Massa's disciple he could not have painted the stokehold of the *Boston Hall* in this high Pergusan palace.

While he painted, day after day, he thought of all that Massa had told him in their evening at San Constanzo. Time, reflection, and the more subtle influences of place were only strengthening his faith in the Dictator's theories. Of all the Utopias that he had ever dreamed none made so direct an appeal to his imagination as that which his friend had shown him. The idea sank into his mind and dominated it, so that he no longer read with horror of the bloodshed that stained the streets of the capital every day, accepting it just as he now accepted his own passive and negligible part in the work of the Revolution.

From his picture he would sometimes turn to his window and inhale the scent of mignonette that rose from a long window-box on the sill of the studio below, watered by hands that he could never see. He had begun to associate this perfume with the name of the mysterious Maddalena. One evening, at such a moment, his consciousness was invaded by the sound of a Trinacrian song, a serenade that Carmela used to sing to herself while she was cooking. That he should hear such a tune in Pergusa was not remarkable—everybody sang the thing in the streets—what made him hold his breath was a sudden conviction that the singer was Carmela herself. He didn't doubt it for a moment, and without thinking he acted. He hurried to his door and ran half-way downstairs to meet the singer, not because he wanted to find Carmela, but because his instinct made him. He was just too late to see the singer disappear within the folding doors of the room beneath, and stood gasping on the staircase, wondering what had made him behave so imprudently, and thankful that, after all, he hadn't been seen. If he had been brought face to face with Maddalena herself, for the voice, no doubt, was hers, how could he have appeared anything but ridiculous? He must pull himself together.

In the end he decided that even if he had landed himself in an embarrassing position he should not have missed the chance of seeing the lady of the mignonette. It was an amazing thing to think that he had now lived in the house for ten days, without as much as catching sight of any member of the Farace family. Perhaps they never left their rooms. If they did emerge, they certainly could not have planned their exits more carefully if they had been aware of the fact that they were being watched. It was unfortunate, as he had seen from the first, that his own floor was above theirs and that the staircase which they probably used lay the whole depth of the palazzo away from his studio. The only point from which he could command their approaches was the garden, and realising this he began to haunt its shades, particularly in the evening when cautious people might reasonably be expected to emerge. After the night of thunder weather came

another wave of heat that gave Bryden the best of excuses for frequenting this new point of vantage.

Night after night, returning from dinner in his café, he took up his station on a stone bench from which, concealed by the fountain's shades, he could see across the *cortile* to where the bronze gates stood up beautifully against the faint lights of the street. In this way, at least, he should see Carlo, the reputed drinker, move out furtively to his evening debauches, or surprise any nocturnal visitor to the Faraces' floor. If once he should identify Carlo he might follow him at a distance and perhaps find some occasion for securing his confidence, probably, as the poverty of the household suggested, through the medium of his purse.

But in this, as in all that had gone before, Bryden was disappointed. Not once, during all his vigils, did he see a human figure enter or leave the courtyard. It seemed that he might suffer martyrdom from a thousand bloodthirsty mouths without furthering his plans in the least. This was a pity in any case, for, apart from this pest, the garden with its flagged paths and great earthen amphoræ of ghostly hydrangeas was a pleasant place to dream in, and as cool as any in Pergusa. Peculiarly grateful in the stony centre of the city was its odour of damp cold soil. This, no doubt, was what bred the mosquitoes, for the basin of the fountain was a dry basking-place for lizards, and the mouth of the cistern was closed by a locked trap-door of iron. Yet, even into this recess, the thirsty breath of the sirocco must penetrate, so that neither flowers nor insects could flourish without artificial water. Evidently, then, some unknown person attended to the wants of both. He decided to ask the *padrona*, with whom, by this time he was almost on friendly terms. To-morrow . . . that most essential word of the Pergusan vocabulary was already coming naturally into his thoughts.

To-morrow. Was that to be the motto of Massa's ideal state? He must resist these degenerative influences. He laughed at himself. Why not take a course of Messiter's American advertisements as a corrective? Next evening he went down to the garden a little earlier than usual. In place of its usual silence he heard the

regular sighing of a siphon pump that came to him from an end of the *loggia* that he had not explored. The room from which it came, no doubt formed part of the *padrona's* quarters. He wondered if there were any entrance to it, rather piqued at his own dullness in not having known before. He found a door, but it was shut. Through the window he saw his friend pumping away in the dark for all she was worth. He addressed her suddenly, and she gave a jump, looking into the darkness behind her as if she could only conceive of a voice having come from that direction.

'Ah, Signor Carlo, how you frightened me! I did not know you were down.'

'It is I,' said Bryden. 'Excuse my coming this way. The animals are driving me mad. To-night they are worse than ever.'

'But what can one do? Where there is green there are mosquitoes.' She laughed. 'They do not harm me. I am too old and dry.'

'You are pumping water to feed them now?'

'How well you guess!'

'Then you are responsible for the hydrangeas? I congratulate you.'

'Not I. It is the signorina who has this passion.'

'Of course . . . I should have known. I already get the benefit of her mignonette. It must be a big labour here. Doesn't her brother help her?'

'Signor Carlo? Not he!' She smiled at the idea.

'No. I suppose he hasn't any great taste for water,' said Bryden seriously.

She stared at him for a moment. 'Ah, I see you know,' she said. 'It's ugly . . . ugly. And I fear it grows worse.' She pulled herself together, as though she knew she had committed an imprudence, and paused in her pumping, rather out of breath. 'I think it is very nearly your time for dinner,' she said. 'The animals, I warn you, are always more furious just after sunset. It is when they wake.'

He would not take her hint. 'Why don't you let me help you with your pumping. It's heavy work for a woman. Already you've lost your breath over it.' For answer she began to pump more violently than

ever. She couldn't dream of any such thing, which was not unnatural, for she had been brought up in a feudal tradition, and no Trinacrian gentleman will soil his hands with work. But Bryden persisted: 'If you won't let me help you, you should at least let me put your pump in order. The bearing in which the handle works is worn or slack. If it's not seen to you'll have trouble.' He left his window and came to the door; but by the time he opened it she had left her pumping and planted herself in the way as though the room were sacred ground from which he must be kept at any cost. Bryden could only smile and ask her what was the matter.

'I have told you already,' she said crossly, 'that it is time for your dinner.'

'Another mystery?' said Bryden.

He knew that this suggestion would distress her.

'How many more times must I assure you that there are no mysteries here?' she cried. 'You torment me like a wilful child, signore. Why do I wish you to go? Is that not clear? In a few moments the Signorina Farace will come here to water the flowers that you admire. I have told you so already. Is it usual for the English to intrude upon the privacy of a lady? I cannot believe it. Go now, signore, while there is time.'

'But it was agreed that I might use the garden,' said Bryden obstinately.

'It was a mistake. It should never have been mentioned. It was they who said you might use it. Cannot people accommodate each other without talking of rights?'

It became impossible for Bryden to hold out any longer. 'Very well, I will go,' he said. 'Perhaps you will convey to the lady my gratitude for the results of her labours?'

The *padrona* clutched at his arm: 'Quickly . . . quickly!' she said. 'My God, she is coming. For my sake quickly!'

By this time nothing in the world could have compelled Bryden to go quickly. He gave a rapid glance toward the arch of the *cortile* and made as if he would pass into the room. 'I'm afraid I'm caught,' he said. 'I'd better shelter in here.'

'No, no, the other way!' she cried, trying to bundle him out of the doorway.

It was a ridiculous situation, but it gave him his first sight of Maddalena Farace. In that moment she appeared, a white figure standing at the foot of the staircase by which she had descended. The light was too dim, and the time too short for Bryden to distinguish her features: all he saw was a tall and ghostly presence, hesitating, with one hand that did not venture to leave the latch of the staircase door: not the living woman that he came to know later, but something pale and flower-like. The *padrona* stood between them with her hands clasped tragically, and for a second Bryden and Maddalena stood gazing at each other. Such a silence could not be broken. Bryden lifted his hat and bowed, and she, still standing erect in her doorway, gave him a ghostly acknowledgement. Nothing more could be done. He left them without speaking, moving with what seemed to him a gross clumsiness, across the flagged path into the *cortile*. As he went he heard the *padrone* breaking her silence with a flood of whispered excuses and from the other an answering laugh. The sound of her laugh took his breath away as much as if a tall madonna lily had suddenly become human.

3

Bryden had forgotten all about dinner. When next he came to himself he was half-way upstairs on the way to his studio. 'If I go down again,' he thought, 'before she has finished it will simply look as if I am trying to examine her.' In any case he had far too much to think about to be hungry; and as he dared not light his lamp, since by doing so he would inform the *padrona* that he had not left the house as usual and set her wondering what deepness he was up to, he sat on in the dark studio for a few moments contemplating the stars that possessed the arch of Messiter's window and trying vainly to think. It annoyed him that his thoughts should have been thrown into disorder by so simple a thing as the meeting below. The only clear thing in

his mind was a desire to go to his window and see what was happening in the garden. Why should he want to do anything of the sort? How could a distant vision of that kind help him in his task? He put these questions aside and stole on tiptoe to the window.

By this time the sky glowed with the reflected light of all Pergusa, but the walled garden lay beneath him as dark as an empty cistern. From it an odour of damp earth ascended mingled with warmer gusts of mignonette. He strained his eyes trying to pierce the darkness from which these scents emerged, and saw, between the stiff foliage of the lemon-trees and the feathery acacias, a white shape moving silently. Softly as a moth it hovered from flower to flower—a moth that only dares to flutter out in the silence of night, a hesitant ghostly creature with soft wings. That was how he saw the shape of Maddalena Farace now; shy, secret, made beautiful by night. Was she beautiful? He had only the *padrona's* word for it. He wished that he knew. All that he was sure of was her fragility, her dignity, the sound of her laugh; and each of these memories contributed to the feeling of shame that swept over him when he pictured himself and all his clumsy scheming devoted to the destruction of such a hapless and innocent creature. His manhood rose in revolt against the picture. He became angry with himself and with Massa. This wasn't a man's work; he hadn't come to Pergusa to spy on women. He left the window, for he could not bear to watch that white figure any longer. Even the crude and irritating devotion of the *padrona* now seemed to him something admirable. What right had he to confuse the woman with his questions? He would go straight away to San Constanzo, find Massa, and throw in his hand. Massa would say he was a sentimentalist. Well, let him, and be damned to him!

He pulled on his hat and hurried out into the street walking violently in the direction of San Constanzo. The exertion cooled his blood. He remembered Massa's strictest orders that no reports should be made except through the agency of the hotel-keeper near the docks, and realised that if he presented himself at San Constanzo and asked to see the Dictator he would probably pass

the night in prison. Much better dine as usual and think the matter over. For an hour he sat sullenly in his usual corner of the restaurant, and by the end of it he had decided that he had very nearly made a fool of himself. If a man who had seriously accepted the rôle of an *agent provocateur* in the service of a cause in which he believed, was going to be shaken by the vision of a white petticoat and the sound of a woman's laugh, he had better confess himself a failure at once.

His bottle of wine restored his confidence. He began to think—or imagined that he thought, more clearly, and considered how he might turn his new knowledge to advantage. In the shock of his first personal contact with Maddalena he had overlooked the most important discovery of the evening. He saw suddenly that chance had revealed to him the thing that his reason should have arrived at long before : the existence of a staircase leading from the *piano nobile* to the *padrona's* quarters. He laughed at his own obtuseness. By this staircase and the street door through which the good woman issued into the narrow lane on the west of the palazzo, his victims might come and go as often as they wished. There, no doubt, they had passed a hundred times, while he had been watching the main entrance of a house like a cat that broods over a deserted mousehole. Now, for the first time, he had something to work on and a chance of making up for his stupidity.

First of all he must pursue his original plan of identifying the son and making his acquaintance. This should now be easy. It was still early, but in order that no chance should be lost he set off at once on a wide detour that brought him into the lane on which the *padrona's* door opened at some distance from the point at which it joined the Street of Palaces. It was a sombre and degraded thoroughfare with high tiers of houses rising on either side, no better, in spite of its aristocratic surroundings, than the blind alley in which Bryden had once so nearly lost his life. Down the centre of it passed an unending procession of country carts laden with produce on the way to one of the city's markets; but long before he reached the level of the palace this stream had been diverted to the right, and

the part of the street in which it would be necessary for him to watch was utterly quiet and deserted.

He stood for more than an hour in the shadow of an archway, and scarcely a soul passed who might question what he was doing. As often as he heard footsteps approaching he struck a match so that he might appear to have slipped into the shelter to light his cigar. By the time that the melancholy bells of the city had struck ten his legs were stiff with tiredness, and he had almost decided to leave his post. The shuffle of a woman who approached, dragging a child behind her, and turned into the arch where he was sheltering, detained him for a fortunate moment, in which the door of the Palazzo Leonforte opened and the figure of a man stepped out into the street. Bryden's hunting instinct quickened; but he could not move, for his friend the *padrona* herself appeared in the doorway and stood gazing rather wistfully after the man who had just emerged. He disappeared into the Street of Palaces. She shut the door with an audible sigh, and Bryden, now satisfied that the coast was clear, hurried after him.

It was a fascinating chase. Carlo Farace went like a rudderless ship, crossing the road for no conceivable reason—unless it were an instinct for creating confusion—cutting into byways and under gloomy arches, turning more than once upon his track to his follower's confusion, drifting away into the unsavoury part of the city that fronts the docks. At this point, when Bryden was beginning to wonder if the man in front were aware of the fact that he was being followed, he turned deliberately into one of the main highways of the city and headed straight for the Central Square to the terrace of the very café in which Bryden habitually took his meals. Arrived there, he walked toward Bryden's very corner, sat down at a table and ordered vermouth. Bryden followed. His waiter, recognising him, pulled out a chair within a couple of yards of the other. Bryden smiled to himself. If this were Carlo Farace he was in luck, for he recognised him as a young man whose neighbour he had been on that terrace for six nights out of seven. He had even noticed him particularly as an eminently paintable Trinacrian type: the fine dark eyes, the Grecian nose

springing straight from between the brows, the proud well-moulded lips. What troubled Bryden was that he never remembered having seen the fellow drunk, though the *padrona*, with her head-shakings, had confirmed the reports of Massa's agents. Perhaps he had never waited long enough to see. This time, at any rate, he would make it his business to watch the young man home.

For the present Carlo seemed to be going quietly enough. He finished his first drink, then called for another, and asked the waiter to bring him pen and paper. He began to write a letter laboriously, but though Bryden strained his eyes he could not see a word that was written. At the end of the first page he appeared dissatisfied and tore the paper in half. If he is careless,' thought Bryden, 'he will crumple it up and throw it on the floor, and that will be my chance.' But he was not careless. He went on tearing the paper into smaller and smaller pieces and finished by putting them in his coat pocket. Then he began to write all over again, sustaining his imagination with glass after glass of neat cognac. Evidently he was well accustomed to soaking liquor, for the fifth glass had not brought as much as a flush to his pale cheeks. He finished his letter and put it in his pocket, lit a cigarette, with fingers that trembled slightly, and went on ordering drink after drink. Bryden, as he saw the dirty notes passing one after another into the waiter's equally dirty hands, pictured them as the scattered remains of the sum that he had paid for his first month's rent. Certainly Carlo Farace cultivated an expensive hobby.

For another half-hour Bryden watched him going paler and paler. The young man's dark eyes grew haggard. He smoked innumerable cigarettes, and ragged children scrambled under his table for the fag-ends without his noticing them. His left hand lay listlessly on the marble slab; the thumb twitched from time to time as though it did not belong to him. After his own fashion he was getting very drunk. The clocks struck midnight. The terrace of the café became crowded and noisy, so that even if he had been much more drunk nobody would have noticed him.

Bryden, watching all this reckless desperate crowd

scattering paper money like dead trees shedding their leaves, felt himself swept up into the splendour of Massa's contrasted ideal of a pastoral state. What would it matter if all this profligate life were destroyed? He himself had drunk more than usual and his brain thought boldly, extravagantly. The terrace was a blur of lights and uniforms and flushed faces, and he himself was quite alone clinging desperately to one idea: the necessity of keeping his eyes on Carlo Farace.

The waiter came to his table and mopped the marble surface, waiting for another order. Bryden raised his head in dissent; but the other went on ordering cognac, sitting there paler and paler staring out into the square. A one-armed newsman pushed his way between the café tables. Carlo beckoned to him, and he pulled an evening paper out of his bundle with his teeth. Carlo held the paper in front of him and stared at the headlines as though they were dancing before his eyes. He pushed the paper away to focus better. Then suddenly he laughed outright and half rose from his chair. Bryden peered over and caught a glimpse of the headlines :—

ANOTHER ATTEMPT ON THE DICTATOR'S LIFE

ASSAILANT ARRESTED

'Curse the fellow: he has the devil's own luck!' Carlo swore, crumpling up the paper into a ball and putting his foot on it. He pushed his way rudely out of the crowd on the terrace, and Bryden, who was not far behind him, soon found himself following the round-about course that they had taken earlier in the evening.

How Carlo Farace managed to find it and stick to it Bryden could not imagine, for the man was so drunk that he staggered on in front with the fantastic steps of an ataxic. Once having escaped from the Central Square that buzzed already with the news of the special edition, they found the streets almost deserted, and for this reason Bryden had to keep a considerable distance behind his man to avoid being noticed, even though by this time it was doubtful if Carlo would have noticed

anything. Bryden wondered if the fresh air and movement were having the same paralysing effect on the other's head as on his own. At any rate his gait showed no signs of deteriorating. Probably, by this time, his legs were like an experienced pony that can be trusted to take its master home from market, drunk or sober.

A little later Bryden began to doubt the instinct of Carlo's legs. Certainly they were no longer following the way by which they had come. He found himself pulled up short, for Carlo had stopped as though he suddenly found it necessary to think. He fumbled in his pocket, searching for the torn fragments of his letter and scattered them on the wind that swept round a gusty corner much in the same way as country people in those parts winnow the husks of their lentils. Then he rubbed his hands together as if bits of paper were sticking to them and set off again, as though by some process of divination his way had been made clear.

Bryden was in two minds. Should he wait and pick up the fragments of the letter in the hope of piecing them together, or should he follow? It almost looked as if Carlo had offered him this sacrifice in the hope of throwing him off. Was it worth it? The question was resolved by his suddenly remembering that the other letter was in Carlo's pocket, and he decided to follow. He hurried on, and soon saw that his victim's legs were still more reliable than he had imagined, having brought him safely into the northern extremity of the narrow street from which they had set out. As they passed into it some electrician in the central power-station turned a switch, and the whole city dropped into darkness.

The only light by which they could now steer came from the narrow strip of starlit sky between the tops of the houses on either side. In front of him Bryden could see nothing; but it encouraged him to hear Carlo softly cursing, twenty yards ahead. The pace slackened, for the road was worn rough by the traffic of the market-carts, and in places flags had subsided leaving foul crevasses that opened on the surface sewers. Bryden, unacquainted with the details of these pitfalls, but painfully aware of them, dropped behind. A high wall rose up on his left. He wondered if it were possibly that of the

Palace garden. At the same moment he heard a cry and the sounds of a scuffle. Two roughs, of the type against which Massa was now waging war in Pergusa, had emerged from the archway in which Bryden had sheltered earlier in the evening and thrown themselves on Carlo Farace. As Bryden ran forward to help he had a sudden vision of an old Academy picture: animals coming in the dusk to an African drinking-pool: a lion robbed of the prey it had followed by crocodiles. Carlo was letting out with the ineffective violence of a drunken man, and before Bryden could reach him he was down in the gutter with one of the assailants running through his pockets while the other sat on him. A blow on the head had stunned him, and he lay quiet. As soon as the others saw Bryden running out of the dark they bolted. He knelt in the gutter over Carlo's unconscious body. How the fellow stank of brandy!

It never occurred to him to see if Carlo were alive. All he thought about in that moment was the letter. He went straight for the pocket into which he had seen it placed in the restaurant and, triumphantly, found it. Carlo gave a groan. So he wasn't dead after all! Bryden's mind, now as clear as day, began to form a plan of action. It had grown a little lighter, for a waning moon, as yet unrisen, was flooding the upper sky. Bryden took his bearings rapidly. He had been right in imagining that the high wall was that of the palace garden. Luckily for him Carlo's body had fallen within ten yards of his own doorstep. It would be easy to drag it as far as that. In the meantime it was his obvious duty to examine the other pockets. He did so, rapidly, always anxious lest his victim's consciousness should return, and found nothing. The brutes had stripped them thoroughly and he could count himself lucky that the letter had escaped. He struck a match. The wind puffed it out. A second showed him that in their flight they had dropped a wallet of notes and something small and shining, which proved to be a signet ring. Bryden put this in his pocket. In the wallet there appeared to be nothing but a little paper money. He heard a sound behind him that made him start. Carlo Farace had moved and was staring at him

with eyes wide open. Bryden had never felt more ashamed of himself in his life; but when he reached the other's side he had relapsed into unconsciousness. He hoisted the body on his shoulders as he had learnt to do in France and carried it to the doorstep. Then he hammered on the door.

Far sooner than he had expected the *padrona* appeared. Evidently, good woman, she was in the habit of sitting up for her profligate and shielding his return. For the moment she only saw Bryden.

'You, signore?' she cried. 'Have you lost your key? What an accident! It might fall into bad hands.'

'No,' said Bryden, still panting with his load. 'Look here!'

She stooped with a cry, and began rubbing Carlo's hands, breaking into a flood of tears and tender diminutives: 'Carluccio . . . my pretty one . . . my dearest,' ludicrously fondling the sodden hulk of her master. 'What an end! What an end!'

Bryden took her by the shoulder and she snarled at him like a dog with a bone. 'He's not dead,' he said. 'He's drunk, and he's had a blow on the head that stunned him. Help me to get him indoors and upstairs.'

Still sobbing violently she helped him to lift the body indoors; but when Bryden suggested that they should carry it farther she protested, saying that she could manage by herself as she had often done before. 'Poor little dear,' she said. 'He can sleep it off in the kitchen. I will watch him.'

Bryden didn't stop to argue. He had seen his chance of entering the *piano nobile*, and didn't mean to lose it. He picked up Carlo's body and staggered across the *cortile* with it on his shoulders. The *padrona* ran after him, crying: 'Not that way . . . not that way!' but he took no heed of her. With an effort he succeeded in carrying his burden to the top of the first flight of stairs, and laid it down before the studio door beneath the bottom of which a faint line of light was showing.

'You will kill her!' screamed the *padrona*. 'Let me tell them first!' But before she could reach the door it was opened and Maddalena appeared carrying a branched chandelier with three lit candles.

'It is nothing, Excellency. It is nothing, my pretty!' wailed the woman.

'Do not be alarmed,' said Bryden. 'It is your brother. He's unconscious, but I think he's only stunned. He was set upon in the street just outside the house. I saw the end of the affair and brought him in.'

Her eyes never wavered. Bryden could not help comparing her self-possession with the other woman's abandonment. 'You're splendid!' he thought, and at the same time was tortured by the unmistakable likeness of her fine pale features to those of the man at his feet. She moved rapidly back into the room and placed the candlestick on the table.

'There is a sofa here,' she said, 'if you will be good enough to carry him in.'

'Brandy, brandy,' cried the *padrona*. 'We must have brandy in case he wakes.

'It isn't brandy he wants,' said Bryden. Maddalena watched him gravely as he carried her brother to the sofa and laid him down. A little gray-haired woman wearing a torn purple dressing-gown appeared in a state of great agitation. The *padrona* enveloped her in tears, kissing her hand.

'What is it? What is it?' she said. 'Maddalena . . . tell me!'

'It is nothing mother. Oh, Carolina, will you stop crying! Nothing . . . Carlo had an accident. He was attacked in the street and this gentleman, our neighbour, brought him in.'

The old lady ran forward to the sofa.' He's dead. Maddalena, you're deceiving me. He's dead. 'Carluccio . . . Carluccio!' My little one!'

'He's drunk, mother?' said the girl. 'That's all.'

The mother turned on her fiercely: 'How dare you say it? Before a stranger too! How dare you?' Who is this man?'

This was the first time that she had acknowledged Bryden's presence. He had been glad of this, for it gave him an opportunity of examining the studio and remembering as many details as he could gather. Indeed there was not much to remember, for all he saw was a room of the same dimensions as his own, furnished with

shabby Empire chairs and tables and hung with faded curtains of the same period. The whole impression was one of a jaded magnificence, infinitely depressing in the candle-light. The only thing in the room that suggested his own trade was an easel that stood before the windows with its back towards him and a square wooden table littered with painting materials. The thing that most excited his curiosity, the picture on the easel, was invisible to him. From this hurried examination the mother's question recalled him.

With all the politeness that he could muster he explained who he was: said that he had the honour to occupy the flat above them, that, coming home late, he had been fortunate enough to cut short the attack on her son, assured her that the case was not serious—a heavy blow on the head, nothing more—and suggested that while his services were available he might as well help to carry the invalid to bed. The old lady condescended to listen, but when it came to answering. addressed him through the medium of her daughter.

'Tell him that we thank him,' she said. 'And say that the servants can carry your brother to his room.' She spoke as if she were sending down a message to a cabman. Bryden did not wait to hear these directions translated by the embarrassed interpreter. The *padrona* was already waiting anxiously to show him the door, and he would have been forced to retire as gracefully as he might had not Carlo saved his situation by waking from his doze, pulling himself up violently on the sofa and rubbing his bloodshot eyes. The old woman put her arms round his neck, but he freed himself.

'Can't you leave me alone?' he said. 'Can't you leave me alone? I've fine news for you! Larco failed. The devil's still alive, and Larco's arrested.'

'Don't . . . don't! For God's sake be quiet! Can't you see there's a stranger here?'

'A stranger?' Carlo grumbled. 'What stranger? 'What are you chattering about? I tell you Massa's escaped. It's in the paper.'

The mother put her hands on his mouth. 'Take him away Maddalena . . . oh! take him away!' she cried piteously.

The girl turned to Bryden.

'Will you follow me?' she said—and led him past the easel into the next room.

There they stood facing each other in the darkness. Bryden was only conscious of her as a faintly-scented figure in white. Her voice came to him speaking slowly, the words exquisitely formed.

'You heard my brother mention the Dictator's name?' she asked.

'I could not help hearing. But I was not surprised. I had heard him talking to himself in the street.'

She gave an exclamation of despair. 'What does it matter? Words of that kind need only be spoken once. We are absolutely in your hands. You have only to give the information and we are done for . . . all of us. You understand that?'

'Yes. I understand perfectly.'

She tried again. 'We have no claim on your generosity. Absolutely none. Already we're under an obligation to you.'

'What obligation?'

'Didn't you save his life?'

'I couldn't have done anything else.'

'If you mention what you have heard you might just as well have left him there to die in the street. He would be shot to-morrow.'

'Obviously.'

'And my mother and I would follow him. Will you be kind enough to tell me what you mean to do?'

'Of course I will tell you. I shall do nothing. This is no business of mine. I understand nothing of your politics. I am an Englishman.'

She gave a gasp of thankfulness. It thrilled Bryden to be able to please her. 'How can I thank you?' she said.

'You needn't thank me. Even if your brother had not spoken I should have made it my business to tell you how imprudent he had been. He drinks too much to be able to control his tongue. To-night in the Café Greco he behaved in a way that might have betrayed him to a dozen people beside myself.'

'What can one do?' she cried. 'What can one do? We cannot go with him.'

An inspiration came into Bryden's head.

'I half wondered,' he said, 'if the men who attacked him were government agents. I don't know what they found in his pockets before I came on the scene, but I was lucky enough to pick up two things that they dropped. A letter and a wallet of paper money. The letter may have been compromising. Here they are.'

He held them out to her and she took them from him in the dark without a word. The next moment he repented of his rashness. A man more practised in his trade would have kept the letter, at least until he had read it. Even so, he consoled himself: what could be a more convincing proof of his goodwill than to have surrendered it unopened?

They stood for another moment in silence. Bryden was at his wits' end how to prolong the interview.

'Now you can surely trust me to carry your brother to bed?' he said. 'There is no reason why I should not help you now that we understand each other.'

'No . . .' she replied. 'You had better come this way. My mother is very nervous. If you knew what we had suffered you would not be surprised. I think you had better not see her again. I can let you out into the corridor if you will follow me.'

They passed through another darkened room and she opened the door for him. The corridor was full of a mild moonlight. Standing in the doorway she appeared to Bryden very beautiful. She held out her hand and he took it, full of shame. If he had obeyed his first impulse he would have opened his heart to her there and then, confessing the double part that he had played.

'It is such a comfort to me,' she said, 'to know what you are. Ever since you came into the studio above we have been anxious. One cannot trust any one in these days. If we had not wanted money desperately we should not have allowed Carolina to let the apartment. You see I am as frank as you have been.'

'I count myself lucky,' said Bryden.

'Perhaps you are luckier than you imagine,' she said with a faint smile, as she took away her hand from his.

'What do you mean?' Bryden stammered.

'If you had answered me differently . . . who knows? . . . I am afraid I should have been forced to kill you. You see, we are fighting for our lives. We have no time to think. It would have been easy in the dark. But now we are friends? Is not that so? And again I thank you.'

She closed the door softly.

The Fifth Chapter

THE GARDEN

I

A FEW moments later Bryden found himself alone in his studio. How he had reached it he scarcely knew, for his mind was in a state of confused exaltation, induced less by the general excitement with which the developing drama of the evening had thrilled him, than by the sweet particular memory of the fingers that had so lately touched his own. What disturbed him was not so much the conventionally romantic idea of beauty and nobility in distress, as the combination of circumstances which had led up to this intimate meeting, and particularly the way in which they had forced Maddalena to play into his hand. If the incident had come suddenly at the beginning of his quest he might have been able to deal with it more decidedly; but everything that had happened during his weeks of watching had conspired to envelop the idea of this woman with a delicate and intriguing mystery. He had been conscious of her romantic setting, as typified by the contrast between the tempestuous times and the secret peace of that deep and ancient garden, before ever he had set eyes on her. Her whole circumstance had pricked his imagination, aided—who knows how subtly?—by the perfume of her flowers, and when he first found himself face to face with her, or rather with the pale and flower-like presence that had appeared in the *padrona's* kitchen, the sight had affected him so much as to disturb his appetite for dinner—which was one of the cardinal symptoms of a known disease.

Yet scarcely had this ferment begun its work in his brain than he had found himself in—or rather forced himself into—a relation by which the most

romantically-minded could scarcely fail to be thrilled — that of a confidant and in some sense a protector. His instincts had committed him to the natural response before he had time to think of his obligations to Massa, and, sitting alone in his dark studio, he reflected, rather ruefully, that he looked like making a mess of the business that he had undertaken in its very earliest stages. This reflection piqued his pride in his powers of self-control. He hadn't come to Pergusa at his age, he told himself, to behave like a schoolboy (though this, in fact, was exactly what he had done;) nor was he the sort of man on whose nerves the genius of a crumbling palace could impose the atmosphere of a decayed chivalry; the time was not one for the development of an idyll but the most crucial and actual in the country's history; the house no setting for a sentimental entanglement but the definite field of his labours; the woman not the pathetic victim that he had imagined it an unworthy mission to pursue, but a capable and dangerous enemy of the cause to which he had bound himself, and the better armed, in the resolution of which she had just given him a taste, by her spirited beauty.

In spite of this dispassionate reasoning he could not quite rid himself of Maddalena's influence. His mind worked clearly and coldly; but his senses were still aware of the assaults that contact with her had made upon him. He thought to himself: 'It's that damned mignonette!' and went to the casement to shut out the ascending perfumè. For a second he stood irresolute before the open window, wondering, in spite of himself, what was happening now in the room above, intently listening. Not a sound came to him but the plaintive whine of a mosquito fanning the air at his ear. He flicked the insect away, and at the same moment the silence was shattered by a burst of firing more intense than anything he had heard since the day of his arrival. Before this bloody reality the dreamy assiduous fancies that had approached him in the dark quickly receded. He closed the window grimly, and when he had lit the lamp and caught sight of his face in the mirror above the mantelpiece, he was encouraged by its

seriousness to believe that he had recovered his senses.

He took pen and paper, determined now to waste no time in reporting to Massa as much as he had discovered; but the firing continued, beating in gusts of sound upon his high window like a gale at sea, and he found that he could not collect his thoughts. Yet, though it disturbed him, the sound strengthened him and made him ashamed of his lapse in the direction of sentiment. It was impossible that the machine-guns could keep up such an infernal chatter unless they were meeting with resistance. Somewhere in the city desperate fighting was going on. He reproached himself for his inactivity and waste of time, and in the midst of this he suddenly remembered that he had seen no more than the head-lines of the newspaper paragraph that told of the attempt on Massa's life.

At the moment when Carlo had left the café, Bryden had thrust the sheet into his pocket. Now he recovered it, crumpled and torn, and held it to the light to see what the smudged print would tell him. The attempt, by whomever planned, had been carefully arranged. Massa had been driving from San Constanzo to the Chamber of Deputies in a closed car, inconspicuously, and unescorted. A bomb had been thrown that shattered the car's radiator and put the carburettor out of gear: the chauffeur had been wounded by splinters of glass, but the Dictator had escaped by jumping out of the car and mingling with the frightened crowd. As luck would have it a couple of detectives happened to be on the pavement and the thrower of the bomb had been arrested. The paper gave no more particulars. Bryden searched in vain for the name of the assailant, for he felt that he had seen it somewhere and wished to recall it. It came suddenly into his mind. Larco. How did he know that the man's name was Larco? For a second his brain would not work, and then he suddenly remembered that he had heard it on the lips of Carlo Farace. 'The devil's still alive, and Larco's arrested!'

The enormity of the implication took him by surprise. If Carlo Farace knew the name of the man who had attempted Massa's life he must have had a hand in the

conspiracy. More—he had used the name of Larco familiarly to the two women, and this implied that they must have known it already. In a moment every atom of pity with which Bryden's fancy had invested the figure of the slight dark girl and that of her confused and inefficient mother vanished from his mind. From that moment he had no doubt but that he was up against something more serious than he had imagined. He laughed at his own simplicity, and there and then drafted a full report of what had happened, confessing even the lapse of prudence that had led him to restore the letter that he had found in Carlo Farace's pocket.

Next morning early he took his report to the hotel near the docks according to Massa's instructions, under the name of Rufo. The proprietor, who still sat steaming in his porter's lodge, sinking deeper and deeper, as Bryden imagined it, in the folds of his own fat chins, took his letter without the least sign of interest and called for a hall-boy, who placed it in a public-letter rack that the landlord himself could have reached if he had been capable of rising from his chair. Bryden was alarmed at this reckless exposure of such important material.

'Are you sure that my friend will get this letter?' he said, 'I think you know the person to whom it is addressed. It seems to me hardly safe in such a public place.'

The landlord raised his eyelids in dissent. 'Am not I always here?' he mumbled. 'Does anything escape my eyes?' The question was difficult for Bryden to answer, for even as he spoke the glittering black points to which he referred disappeared from view and the landlord's head began to nod. Bryden roused him with another question. 'Could he expect a reply from Professor Rufo in the same place, and in a short time? In answer to this the landlord could not even get as far as the exasperating 'Who knows?' which is the nearest approach to a definite statement that the average Pergusan ever attains. He merely tilted his head up and made a faint outward movement with his hands, both actions being so feebly performed that Bryden got the impression that the original impulse, whatever it were,

had been smothered by layer upon layer of fat, before ever it reached its destination. Reluctantly he left his letter in the rack and the landlord snoring, with a vivid distrust of Massa's methods of correspondence. Indeed, the indefiniteness of the whole business made him feel like a regimental commander who has lost touch with the units on either side of him in the first stages of an important action.

He made his way back to his accustomed café and sat on the terrace reading the morning's paper and sipping an aperitif. The sheet contained what appeared to be a more detailed account of Massa's escape from assassination, but Bryden soon saw that the official journalist had cleverly spun out his paragraph, giving no new information and still suppressing the name of the man who had been arrested. 'Justice has been performed,' the paragraph ended, and from this Bryden concluded that Larco, whoever he may have been, had been shot. At this hour of the morning the café terrace was almost empty, and the waiter, with time on his hands, was inclined to talk. Bryden encouraged him, for the attitude was rare in revolutionary Pergusa, and picked up not only the whole story of the fighting that he had heard the night before, but a pretty accurate idea of the average Pergusan's opinions on the subject and above all of the city's overwhelming fatigue.

'I see that you study the papers,' said the waiter, 'but if you are wise you will not believe one word that is written in them. What do they tell us when there is bloodshed like that of last night? They say that 'disorderly elements in the port are getting out of hand'; cry that 'the revolution is in danger'; assure us that the money of reactionaries, money from other countries, is behind all the disturbance. Money! What is money?'—he pulled a wad of the revolutionary paper currency from his pocket and surveyed it contemptuously—'Do you think that men would risk their lives for this rubbish? What does money mean but bread? Men cannot live on paper, and the bread that this should buy simply does not exist!' He confided to Bryden that he had a cousin a farmer in the interior, who had written him piteous letters describing the

vast acres that had once stood under corn, and now lay fallow because the country people, the new race of proprietors, having sold their last crops for more money than they had ever handled before, refused to cultivate. 'They have kept grain of their own,' said the waiter, 'but we in the cities must starve, and people who starve are as savage as animals: that is certain.'

Bryden asked him for his remedy, but he only shook his head. 'These are not days in which one can talk,' he said, 'not even among old acquaintances such as you and I.' When Bryden pressed him he became nervous and hurried to assure him that he was a good Republican. 'But in a place like this,' he said, 'one cannot help hearing what people say. The little people in the port show what they feel by sacking shops and rioting for bread; when their lives are so wretched they do not value them. With us it is different. We must keep our thoughts to ourselves. They think we are prosperous, and hate us for it. Prosperous! I tell you the sight of this money that I handle makes me sick. And the little patrimony that I had saved for my old age. What is it worth now? Paper . . . only paper! It is difficult to be a good Republican.'

'And do you not believe,' Bryden asked, 'in all that the journals tell you of reactionary movements and monarchist conspiracies?'

Still he would not commit himself. 'I only know,' he said, 'that there is one name that one hears often in these days: that of the Duke of Riesi. But if the Duke were more than a man what could he do in this country? Something must happen, one way or the other. There is only one thing worth praying for, and that is the end of the world.'

With this profoundly melancholy reflection he left Bryden to his drink.

2

The clocks of Pergusa hammered out the hour and the café began to fill with people. Bryden kept his eyes open for the figure of Carlo Farace, but naturally enough, considering the violence he had suffered the night before,

Carlo did not appear. He made a leisurely lunch. Apart from the black and branny substance that was doled out to him as his allowance of bread and the lack of coffee and sugar, the meal was a good one. Here, at any rate, there was no starvation, yet always, in the back of his mind, he heard the tempestuous firing of the night before, and this subdued and threatening undercurrent of sound invested the life that swarmed around him, the flushed faces of the eaters, the laughter, the movement, the colour and the gay tinkle of glasses, with a quality of the unreal. These things, every one of them, were part of a dream; the other, though no more than a memory, starkly and persistently real.

It was in Bryden's nature to sentimentalise, and the sight of a party of young women who were lunching with a couple of officers at the table next to his, affected him so strongly that he felt he could not stay there any longer in face of their freshness, their beauty, their hallucinated gaiety. In the streets he was tortured by the same obsession. *There is only one thing worth praying for, and that is the end of the world. Something must happen one way or the other. . . .*

But nothing was happening. That was the deuce of it! The life of Pergusa, in this, the crowded centre, was moving on as it had moved for the last twenty years under the vertical midday sun. In the gutters stood the barrows of the melon sellers and the stalls of women who set out a cool display of cut lemons and earthen amphoræ of water, lounging contentedly, caring little for what they sold. Over the burning pavements moved the midday crowd of women workers from the state tobacco factories and pale girls from the shops. They clustered like flies about the windows of the perfume sellers in the narrow *Corso;* they hung together in little laughing groups, and smiled at Bryden as he passed. What did the passionate hopes of Massa mean to them? What, to them, was the history of Trinacria, to them or to the masses of people who clung to the packed platforms of the trams that swung past one by one with their clanging bells? Bryden searched their faces in vain for any signs

of a divine discontent. All that they sought for, all that they hoped, was the gratification of small individual ideas: the prospect of a square meal and a bottle of wine, the gain of an odd note of printed paper, the enchanting possession of a new hat. What could Robert Bryden or the Duke of Riese or Enrico Massa do for them except disturb the placid current of their lives, so trivial in its constituents, so overwhelming in the mass? Bryden began to wonder whose was the hallucination, theirs or his. He felt that he must rub his eyes to see more clearly.

Even when he reached the Palazzo Leonforte he could not free himself from this emotional sense of detachment from reality. What could be more unreal than this great and gracious house of weathered stone with its cool well of a garden and its echoing marble corridors. What earthly relation had it to the strife that a few months before had shattered its windows and scored its stones with the tracks of machine-gun bullets? On the threshold he was met by the admonitions of its calm and brooding spirit. Its very silence impressed him with the superiority of human life and endeavour in its continuity to the political struggle in which he had embroiled himself. Standing in the vast and silent courtyard Bryden refused to admit this—he would not allow himself to admit it. He told himself, passionately, that it was his duty to fight for the happiness of mankind, refused to admit for one moment the futility of his mission, and the stones of the house answered him: 'Happiness? Do you think you can make men happier by tearing their society to shreds and remaking it according to your ideas of fitness? Does such a thing exist as a happy society? We know better . . . we know better. Centuries have taught us that happiness is the treasure of the individual soul and body—the mysterious product of a million infinitesimal circumstances that have their birth within them: each of us carries the seeds of happiness within him: you, and each of the people whom you have seen in the streets, and the dead men who laid us.'

He went up to the studio and tried to work. It was the hour when all sensible people in Pergusa were

taking their siesta. The heat congealed the flow of his ideas, and so he gave up the attempt.

All afternoon he lay on his bed, restlessly thinking, unresigned to this forced inactivity. He was anxious to be doing something if only in order that he might not think; but the sky poured down heat upon Pergusa like a white-hot bowl of metal inverted; it seemed as if even the sounds of the city were stifled by heat, for Bryden in his high chamber could hear nothing but the hum and jangle of the trams. He slept, and woke at last to find that the heat had gone from the sky. He was a new man. He dressed himself and stepped out into the street. While he slept the city had re-awakened into a gay and garrulous life; the people moved briskly, happily, and chattered like birds after a summer shower. Bryden himself, in this moment of relief, began to feel ashamed of his hallucinated morning and eager to put himself in touch with his work again. He now felt that he could not have been betrayed into such weakness if he had not been playing a lonely hand, and his anxiety to re-establish himself turned his steps once more in the direction of Massa's post office. Even if no reply awaited him the walk would do him good, for it was more than probable that the morning's morbidities had something to do with his liver.

The hotel-keeper still drowsed in his box, lifting one sleepy eyelid on Bryden's approach. He glanced quickly at the letter rack; saw with satisfaction that the envelope in which he had put his report was gone. In its place was another addressed to him in the name of Robert Blake. He opened it eagerly and found a short note in Massa's sprawling hand. It acknowledged the receipt of his report without comment or approval, and begged him to be more zealous than ever. 'The matter is as serious as it can be,' Massa wrote, 'and you could not be better placed. I expect to hear news from you of the Duke of Riesi. Believe me it is "touch-and-go."' Nothing more. Bryden read the letter through twice. His first impulse was to destroy it, but before he had decided how this might best be done he heard the scrape of a match and the landlord had pushed a lighted candle toward him. Bryden smiled and thanked

him; but by the time that he had burnt his letter the man was asleep.

He left the hotel curiously encouraged. Massa's letter, short as it was, had served to put him in touch once more, not only through its assertion of his mission's importance, but also by virtue of the peculiar influence that the Dictator always exercised upon his mind, the demand on his affections, more potent than any appeal to principles, that seemed to be transmissible even through the medium of ink and paper. Massa, after all, was the only man in the world whom Bryden loved; and Massa, as he clearly gave him to understand, was fighting for his life. Even if Bryden had not been a believer in Massa's genius he was at least his friend, and friendship demanded that he should take his place by Massa's side in this emergency.

On his way homeward the extreme seriousness of the situation was borne in on him, for this time he passed through the quarter of the city in which the fighting of the night before had taken place. Barricades of country carts piled together with masses of paving stones uprooted from the roadway barred the streets. The pavements were scattered with broken glass and pools of dried blood. A silence of fear and of exhaustion overhung the quarter, and not a soul moved in the streets. Only from the high shuttered windows on either side white faces peered down at him as he passed. It almost seemed as if none of the inhabitants dared descend into the streets until those traces of blood and violence should have been removed, and Bryden could not blame them. It struck him as curious to see how the deadly area was defined as sharply as a patch of mortification in healthy tissue, for he passed suddenly from its sinister influence into a street that buzzed with life.

A hundred paces away from him this street was blocked by a crowd, and he had begun to wonder if his luck had landed him in the beginnings of a new disturbance when he saw that all its units were struggling for places before the doors of a baker's shop. As he approached, the doors were thrown wide and people surged into the opening, tumbling over each other's

bodies like bees clustered about their queen. From every alley of the street new-comers swarmed in to increase the confusion. Bryden heard the cries of women caught and crushed in the middle of the mass. There was no order in the distribution, and those who had bought their bread had to fight their way out again through those who waited. He saw a big lout of a man in a blue apron plunging through the mass with a loaf in either hand and a knife held in his teeth. Once free of the crowd he squatted down in the gutter and fell to tearing the loaf to pieces, stuffing the hot bread into his mouth. He was like some animal of prey tearing at a carcass. And then, as though some outside influence had suddenly co-ordinated the various minds of the crowd, or rather as if its elements had suddenly been fused into one savage intelligence commanding one fierce body, the whole mass swept forward, howling, tearing down the shutters of the shop, less mad for bread than for the absolute joy of destruction.

In a second the whole street had gone mad. Even the man in the gutter dropped his bread and ran with his knife in his hand. Everywhere frightened shopkeepers were hurrying to put up their shutters; but shutters were of no use against the will of this crowd. In two minutes half a dozen shops had been gutted. Bryden, gazing, was almost knocked off his feet by a small naked child who ran blindly at him with a bundle of coarse lace in his arms. At the end of the street a picket of carabineers stood smoking cigarettes beside their piled arms.

Bryden knew that it would not be long before blood was shed, and made his way through the alleys into another street where people sat at their doors unconscious of the neighbouring conflagration. He knew now that Massa was right. If violence and madness could arise so suddenly and from such trivial reasons—or rather as unreasonably as any squall at sea—heaven only knew what might happen in Pergusa at any moment. He remembered the words of his friend at the Café Greco: *Something must happen one way or the other*, and realised their truth. And in that moment a new light broke on his troubled mind. He saw this collective madness of a quiet people as the result of a struggle in

which they had neither interest nor will, the irritation of masses whose individual lives had been disturbed and their happiness shattered by a conflict of forces that they did not know and for which they did not care. What did they know of Massa or of the Duke of Riesi, or of the ideas that these two men symbolised? What did they care for ideas of any colour? All that they asked was that they should be permitted to live and sleep and love after their own manner: their violence was only a symptom of minds exasperated by hunger and bloodshed, blindly fighting for a way out of their misery toward peace. Who then could say that the aristocratic plotters were more to blame than Massa and himself? There was not a ha'penny to choose between them in their responsibility for the madness and suffering of Pergusa. The only thing that mattered, the only cure for this evil was the end of strife. There surely, if anywhere, his duty lay.

And he was powerless. As long as the world existed he supposed there would be people like Massa, the Faraces, and himself who were sufficiently obsessed by their ideas to die for them and were careless as to how many others died as well. In that moment the rightness of his political creed seemed to Bryden a small thing. Looking beneath the labels with which the two parties smothered their motives he saw that the real root of the struggle was hate, an equal hate on the side of those who were in possession and those who were dispossessed, and therefore a vicious circle of hate. And how could it be ended? Bryden told himself that it could never be ended as long as a man could call anything his own, and another could envy his possession. The most that he could hope for was the relative peace that would follow a crushing victory on either side, a dazed peace of exhaustion. It did not seem to him to matter much on which side he fought as long as this end were attained; but since he had already enlisted himself on the side of the majority he might just as well stick to it, not through any overwhelming confidence in the rightness of Massa's cause—the sights of the last few days had shaken his faith in that or, at least, in its results—but because it seemed to him that victory and peace lay nearest to

Massa's hands. So, having quietened his conscience, with this muddled thinking, he set himself grimly to work. He didn't realise the strain that he was imposing on his own nature by adopting the cause of a majority.

3

The riot of which Bryden had seen the beginning that afternoon, after smouldering for a couple of hours, as fires will, in a narrow compass, and gathering strength as it smouldered, suddenly burst into flame and raged through half the slums of Pergusa. A number of shops of all descriptions were sacked and gutted by crowds that had no need for their particular contents, but seemed to find a capricious joy in destruction for its own sake. At sunset the mob made an unexpected attack on the central power-station and threw the whole city into darkness, and all through the evening there was bloody fighting in streets lit only by the swerving searchlights of Massa's armoured cars. The sack of many wine-shops had maddened the crowds, and in the area to which the carabineers had skilfully confined the fighting they made a shambles, for no other reason than that they were drunk and unhappy. Early in the struggle a cordon had been thrown about the disordered quarter. In the cafés of the central Square where Bryden spent his evening, life went on with its usual fevered gaiety, and the crowd that filled them seemed noisier than ever for lack of competition on the part of the jangling trams that stood empty, like abandoned tanks, at the points where power had failed them. The bourdon that their progress usually supplied was replaced by the stutter of maxim fire, filling the intervals between the performances of the café orchestra with sinister sound. The contrast was obvious; the worn theatrical cliché which it suggested moved Bryden more deeply than he would have cared to confess, and when he returned late at night to the Street of Palaces he blessed its quietness.

He knew that it was useless to think of sleep as long as the guns were at work, and decided therefore to sit

for a little while in the cool of the garden countering the assaults of mosquitoes with a last cigar. Even as he entered it he became conscious of another presence, guessed that it was that of Maddalena, and was sensible of the thrill that one feels when he is on the point of meeting a man who is his enemy or a woman he loves. There, on the stone bench that he usually occupied, half concealed by the fountain, Maddalena was sitting. Bryden hesitated, then bowed, and she rose to go. He made an effort to detain her:

'I am afraid I have disturbed you,' he said, 'Please forgive me. It was so late that I thought the whole house would be asleep?'

'How can one sleep,' she said, 'with the sound of firing in the air? But you have come from the city? Tell me what is happening?'

'We're all equally in the dark,' he said, smiling. 'You see, they got at the power station.'

She passed his very English attempt at humour without recognition.

'Yes?' she said.

'I think it began with a bread-riot—if one can honestly call the substance for which they were rioting bread.'

'Poor wretches!' she said. 'How long can it last?'

He smiled at the way in which she echoed his own questions of the afternoon. By this time he was sure of the answer that he had found for himself as an intelligent outsider. After all, what rôle could suit his feigned circumstances better than that of a tolerant neutral?

'It will last just as long as the two parties above them are fighting for power like dogs over a bone. Pergusa, unfortunately, is the bone, and by the time they've finished it won't be worth having.'

She shook her head. 'You don't understand,' she said. 'It's natural that you shouldn't. This firing maddens me.'

'That too is natural,' said Bryden. 'You're a woman. All this violence is frightening.'

She stiffened quickly. 'Frightening? *I* am not frightened! I have seen worse things than this. I mean that it makes me feel restless and impotent.

I listen to it from a distance. I feel that I'm failing in my duty.'

'You don't consider that it's your duty as a woman to fight?'

'That depends,' she said seriously. 'Women must take their share.'

'They do so—in anxieties.'

'Anxieties!' she cried. 'I am not an Englishwoman!' She controlled herself. 'You will excuse me; I do not wish to belittle the women of your country, but we are different and you must not judge us in the same way.' She moved to go, then checked herself. 'There is one other thing,' she said. 'I am afraid that you may have felt that my mother, the other night, was lacking in courtesy. It would be a pity if you got that impression. She has suffered a great deal, and recently she has not seen many people. In such a moment of stress she may have used words that she would not have dreamed of if she had known that you understood Trinacrian. I hope you will make allowances.'

'You might have trusted me to understand. I myself am much more lacking in courtesy. I have not asked you how your brother is getting on.'

'He is better, but still keeps his room. It is kind of you to ask.'

'Naturally I am interested. It was fortunate for me that I was of any use. Indeed, I'm still puzzling my head to imagine why he should have been attacked on his own doorstep . . .'

She checked him.

'It is better,' she said, 'that a foreigner should not puzzle his head about things in Trinacria. You will be much happier if you leave them alone.' She moved toward the door of the *padrona's* room.

'No, no,' he said. 'Your advice may be excellent, but I shan't take it. During the last week I have seen a great deal of misery and felt it deeply. Even if one is a foreigner one cannot be unmoved.'

She smiled, and the gesture irritated him. Once more his spontaneous emotions gave an appearance of sincerity to the part he meant to play. He begged her to stay. 'We had so little time to speak last night,'

he said, 'that I hadn't a chance of explaining myself. Perhaps you don't want to hear me. I can't help that. My feelings are too strong to allow me to consider yours, and there's no time so good as the present. We are quite alone and nobody can hear what we say. Perhaps your rules, your customs will not allow you to be alone with me. I assure you that you need not be afraid.'

'Afraid?' She laughed at him. 'No, I'm not afraid.'

'Then you will permit me to speak frankly. This is the truth. Until last night I had no idea that the man whom I was lucky enough to help was your brother and my neighbour. For all that I had often seen him in the café where I take my meals, and I'm bound to tell you that I had noticed his imprudence.'

'We know he is imprudent. That is Carlo's nature.'

'After last night I feel a certain responsibility. Now that I know how things stand, I may be of further use to you. I mean that I may save him perhaps from the consequences of his imprudence.'

'You speak very seriously,' she said, 'almost as if you imagined that Carlo were connected with the movements that the new government describes as reactionary. Once more I beg you not to concern yourself with politics. What reason have you to jump at such conclusions?'

'None but the reasons that you have given me yourself.'

'I?' she cried. 'But that is ridiculous!'

'You are evidently forgetting what happened last night. Surely you were a little—how shall I put it?—intense when you begged me for so much secrecy, and were ready to enforce it with such very decided methods.'

She laughed uneasily, and Bryden saw that now, at least, she would stay. He felt that he was winning, and the sense of power pleased him. For other reasons, that he would not have admitted, he was glad to prolong his interview with this strangely fascinating woman. She spoke persuasively, treating him almost as a friend.

'You may forget anything that I said last night,' she urged. 'To begin with you must make allowances for our difference of temperament. Is it any wonder that I was nervous and excited? Do not forget that

I am Trinacrian. And again, do not forget that every member of our class—I don't disguise from you the fact that we are noble—has lived a life of persecution during the last nine months. If I could tell you all that we have been through! But I won't: you would scarcely believe it. All I can tell you is that we ask nothing but the right to live our own lives quietly in the first seclusion that we have found in all that time. I don't pretend that we have not strong political feelings. We were born with them, and Carlo, unfortunately, cannot conceal them; but that does not mean that we do not accept things as they are. In this country no one is allowed to possess feelings or opinions opposed to the government. The least breath of suspicion would destroy all our peace and cause us to be hunted again, and, as I've told you, we have suffered enough. My mother is an old woman and could not bear much more. That was all I meant to say. No doubt you misunderstood me.'

Bryden shook his head. 'You give me credit for more simplicity than I possess,' he said. 'Why can't you be as candid with me as I have been with you? I'm not quite a fool. I'm capable of putting two and two together. That your brother should have been disappointed at the Dictator's escape from death was nothing. He was merely expressing the natural sentiments of his class. But there was more than that. He mentioned the name of the man who attempted Massa's life. He said: "Larco is arrested."'

'Surely there is nothing strange in that. Hadn't he read it in the paper?'

'No, he had not read it in the paper. The name of Larco has not yet appeared in any official report. In other words, your brother knew more about the attempt than it is healthy for a man to know.'

'You must be mistaken,' she said eagerly. 'No doubt by that time the name was common property. You are being a little too clever.'

'No. My reasoning couldn't be sounder. Your brother received the news as I did, in the paper. From that moment he had no opportunity of getting any other information.'

'How can you know that?'

Bryden saw that he had blundered. If he were to admit that he had followed Carlo from the café to his home he might as well throw up the sponge at once. He covered himself rapidly. 'Perhaps I can't say that. But I can say that if he learned Larco's name on the way home he must have communicated with people who knew it and were therefore in some way connected with the attempt.'

She drew away from him. He felt that she was like an animal finding space to attack him. In the light of what she had said the night before, the sensation was uncomfortable.

'You're threatening us . . .' she said.

'Don't imagine I'm doing anything of the sort,' he protested. 'I'm merely begging you to be candid with me . . . as candid as I have been with you. If my interest hadn't been benevolent do you think for one moment that I should have given back to you your brother's letter—as likely as not a piece of damning evidence against him?' She did not answer him. He could only see her face pale in the darkness, her body held tense to spring. 'I think you owe me a little confidence he said. 'I do not even know your real name. Beyond the fact that your brother is in touch with the friends of the Duke of Ricsi . . .' She interrupted him:

'No, no,' she cried. 'You have no right to say that. Do you think you can force yourself into our confidence?'

'Indeed, no. But I beg you to give it me. Mostly because I believe I can help you and because I've given you proof of my good intentions. Don't forget that I'm English. Even if England isn't at war with the Trinacrian Republic, the English people have shown by their blockade that they are opposed to Massa's régime, and if that weren't enough, haven't I seen for myself the misery that it has caused: haven't I realised that anything would be better than its awful present? Haven't you every reason to trust me? There's another thing: my mother was a Trinacrian of a noble family. That in itself affects my sympathies, and that is not all. Can you not believe that I have a personal feeling in the matter—that I feel a little kindly toward yourself?'

Bryden was conscious of the genuine fervour that he put into the last part of his argument. It fell abominably flat. She brushed it aside so definitely that he felt he had made a mistake.

'No, no, that has nothing to do with it,' she said. 'You do not know us.'

'Perhaps then you will give me the chance of knowing you?'

'That is quite useless.'

'Or at least accept my help?'

'I can't say . . . I can't say.'

'Really you should not be afraid of me.'

'And you should not think me ungrateful. If you knew how we were situated you would understand. It is impossible to trust any one, and that implies no criticism of yourself.'

'But if I give you further proofs of my interest, my benevolence?'

'It is very late. Perhaps we shall meet again.'

Very frankly, as he thought, she held out her hand to him, then left him without another word.

4

Even more than the hand-clasp of Maddalena, Bryden found himself remembering her last words. The fact that she should have offered him of her own free will the meeting which his caution had forbidden him to demand, assured him that his affairs were going better than he had imagined, that, by his very reticence and inaction, he was already attaining the kind of familiarity that he had hoped for, making his voice, his movements, his features gradually familiar to her in much the same way as the trainer habituates a timid wild animal to his presence. He flattered himself on a certain technical achievement in his new profession, and the natural elation which this mastery produced made it easy for him to thrust into the background another essential aspect of the case: his thoroughly unprofessional interest in Maddalena's person.

Each of his meetings with her had left him with a

curious restlessness for which it was difficult to find a parallel in his previous experience. The affair with Carmela; the only considerable sexual relation of his life, had been sudden, direct. With her he had never been in the position of an anxious lover—of all that she could give him she had made him an immediate and astonishing present—nor, till the very end, had she ever left him, with the result that only in his final desertion had he known the pains of love. Now, in his hours of enforced idleness or those that he tried to fill with work, he began to find himself thinking of Maddalena as though she herself were the centre of his problem, and thinking a good deal less of her mysterious politics than of her physical attributes, of which, also he knew considerably less than he desired.

This symptom was embarrassing, and he entered into a deliberate conspiracy with his conscience to suppress it, or at least to assure himself that a fuller knowledge of her person and of her guarded soul was essential to his success as a secret agent and a valid excuse for the large part that she occupied in his thoughts. So, having squared his conscience, he laid himself open, with a sense of legitimate luxury, to memories of the few occasions on which he had seen her.

They came to him suddenly, without volition; without order; and though he surrendered himself to their obsession, each of them was so incomplete, so transient, so different from the others that they left him still unsatisfied. Four times he had seen her: first as the mothlike presence of the garden, next as she stood in candlelight waiting solemnly for the unconscious Carlo, next with the dagger in her hand, and then in the softly serious mood of their last meeting: four times, and yet he could not even be certain that she was beautiful! The only quality that he could definitely assign to her was a certain fineness that showed itself in her speech, her eyes, her carriage: a general sense of resiliency and temper: the quality of an old rapier blade. In his experience he could find no other being with whom to compare her, unless, indeed, it were with Carmela, had little enough in common but her Trinacrian blood and those potentialities of passion that made a

knife seem an appropriate weapon in the hands of either.

'It is important,' he thought, 'that next time I see her it shall be in daylight.'

But the meeting on which her last words had encouraged him to count now seemed farther away than ever. Night after night, being cheated of any daylight vision, he waited for her in the garden, killing time by endless and meaningless discussions with the *padrona*; but Maddalena never appeared, and he was forced to the conclusion that she had changed her routine with the deliberate intention of avoiding him. He sat for long hours at his window, hoping, in this way, to catch a glimpse of her, amusing himself, for very boredom, with the pile of American magazines that his predecessor had left in the bookcase.

Sitting thus one day, in the drowsy hour of the siesta, he found himself staring at a year-old photograph of the Trinacrian royal family: the queen seated with the crown prince at her knee and her daughter beside her, and behind them, standing, the king, a fiery little man with fierce gray moustaches and his hand on the hilt of his sword. At the king's left hand stood his brother, the Duke of Riesi, a suave figure with a pale, impassive face, plump, almost dapper, the type of superior civil servant whom one might meet any day crossing the Mall on the way from his office to his club.

This picture filled Bryden's mind with a gentle melancholy; even the conscious royalty that lay behind the attitude of every member of that little group added an indefinite pathos to it. He saw them, in essentials, as a small and reasonably happy family party, people with humble ideals and aspirations of their own who had been caught up and massacred—all but one of them—by the vast irresponsible forces of revolution: as innocent and helpless as any of the families that one might see displayed in the shop windows of Pergusan photographers by the dozen.

His gaze lingered on the undistinguished features of the Duke of Riesi, the centre, the inspiration of the forces that he was now supposed to be fighting. He gazed on

them with incredulity and wonder, for it seemed to him ridiculous that a man of that kind could inspire any feeling but pity for his forlorn circumstances. A dull fellow, he pictured him, with few desires in life beyond the enjoyment of his horses, his dogs, and the many mistresses with whom the revolutionary propaganda had scandalously equipped him: a man whose sole virtue lay in his acceptance of an uncomfortable birthright, the obligations of royalty that had been hammered into his mind ever since the day when first it could think. Poor devil! Perhaps it would have been better for him if he had been butchered with the others: his fiery little brother, his virtuous sister-in-law, and those two serious children. That such a man should ever inspire a personal loyalty, particularly in a woman so finely made as Maddalena Farace, seemed to Bryden ridiculous, and this conviction gave him a certain satisfaction, for in imagining the relations of the Duke and the Farace family he had taken for granted on her side something of the romantic devotion that inspired the women of the forty-five, and thus experienced a soreness that might have been taken for jealousy if there had been any valid reason for which he should be jealous. He laughed at himself, for jealousy implied an interest in Maddalena that was more than political, and this he was determined not to admit.

Even so, in spite of the new trend that his thoughts had taken, the contemplation of the royal portraits had thrown him into a mood of sentimental pity that he considered it his duty to suppress, so much so that he turned the page to escape from the appeal of these poor victims' faces. It seemed to him that the atmosphere of the Palace encouraged such weaknesses. He wished, suddenly, that he might escape from it, and, indeed, for all the help his sojourn there had given him, he might just as well have been somewhere else out of the reach of these subtle spiritual influences. As far as he was concerned the rest of the house might just as well have been empty. There he sat, day after day, too near the centre of the events that he was supposed to be examining to be aware of their progress. A looker-on, he reflected, would see far more of the game;

and for a moment he felt inclined to make himself more of an outsider, to trade on the acquaintance that he had already established, but to move his quarters: to take a room, for example on the opposite side of the Street of Palaces, or, better still, in the narrow alley from which he could watch the *padrona's* doorway.

He considered this project seriously; but when it came to making up his mind he found himself powerless to change; he was assailed by suggestions for which he could not hold himself responsible: as that a hurried removal would only make him conspicuous; that the studio, after all, was particularly suited to his work; that it would be humiliating to confess himself beaten by such shadowy influences as those of place; that his duty and his inclinations both compelled him to increase his knowledge of Maddalena, and that, with this end in view, he would be foolish to abandon a position which still gave him possibilities of meeting her.

For the hundredth time since the beginning of his adventure it came to him that he had never fully exploited the nature of his calling, on which Massa had insisted at their first interview. It was ridiculous that two painters should live under the same roof and yet be unacquainted with each other's work. He resolved, when next he saw her—though heaven only knew when that might be—to find an opportunity of asking to see her pictures; he even formed the terms in which he should make his request; then hesitated, fearing lest anything so definite might awaken her distrust. It would be better, no doubt, to induce her to ask for his technical advice, but this was more easily imagined than accomplished.

Next day, tired with waiting, and, if the truth be told, still hungry for the sight of her, he decided to put his first plan into action. Hearing a stir in the studio beneath him, he went downstairs boldly and stood at the door of her room. A sound of voices held him on the threshold, and he halted, listening. He heard the tones of Maddalena, bright and eager; the precise, clipped speech of another woman whom he took to be her mother, the drawl of a man who must surely be Carlo, and then, with a sudden, devastating clearness,

the voice that had brought his heart into his mouth on the stairs a few days before, the voice that he could have sworn belonged to Carmela. His resolution left him, for though he told himself, as before, that he might easily be deceived, his mind was obstinately convinced that he would know that voice among a thousand, and if once, disregarding his intuitions, he entered the room and found himself face to face with a woman who knew not only the ordinary circumstances of his life, his name, and his origins, but even his ancient friendship with Massa, he might be sure that his mission was at an end: even more, that he would never speak to Maddalena Farace again.

He dared not face it. He crept upstairs again, his heart thudding like a steam hammer, his soul overwhelmed with an almost physical dread. Later, made miserable by doubt, he hated his irresolution. It would have been better, he thought, to face the matter out and be done with it. 'I'm getting nervous,' he said, 'unreasonably nervous. I must pull myself together.'

That very evening, as luck would have it, he found himself within twenty yards of Maddelena as he was leaving the palazzo on his way to the café. He turned to meet her, but she, seeing his movement, hurried away as though she wished to escape him. Immediately his doubts took on a new complexion. Supposing that the voice were indeed Carmela's; supposing that she had already seen him, without his knowledge, and told the Faraces what she knew of him? He knew that he was building upon the most shadowy surmises, that he was alarming himself without reason; and yet he went on his way trembling, half wishing that some greater catastrophe might throw them together, automatically precipitating the lesser by revealing the truth of his situation. The charged atmosphere of the city aggravated his own emotional tension. *Something must happen one way or the other.* He wished to God something would.

The Sixth Chapter

TERROR

I

A FEW hours later, still harassed in his mind by the refusal of Maddalena to meet him, Bryden recognised the figure of Carlo Farace passing rapidly, and with a reasonable directness, along the pavement in front of him. The distraction was welcome, and by a quick manœuvre he contrived that they should meet on the café steps.

Whatever Maddalena's attitude might be, there was happily no question of Carlo's obligation to the man who had picked him up in the street. 'To say nothing of rifling his pockets,' Bryden's humour maliciously added. So, confidently, he bowed, wished the young man good evening, and congratulated him on his recovery. Carlo stared at him as if they had never met, made no answer to his salutation and slouched on into the café, leaving Bryden angry on the pavement. A colonel of the Republican Guard, stalking in with his hand on his sabre-hilt, jostled him—naturally enough, for he was obstructing the passage—and Bryden's temper, already smouldering under Carlo's slight, went up in a flare. In a moment he was English, conscious of the Anglo-Saxon's habitual contempt for the uniformed members of the Latin races with a little less than Anglo-Saxon equanimity. He felt that he had been insulted by two damned Dagoes running; was spoiling, in fact, for a row.

He turned on the officer with his fist clenched; but the colonel, luckily for Bryden, was too absorbed by the effect that his breastful of ribbons was creating to take any heed of the threatening figure behind him. A civilian at Bryden's elbow laughed, and he realised that he was making himself conspicuous. He moved clumsily toward his usual corner, burning under the

contemptuous gaze of Carlo Farace, who cleverly gave him his back as he approached.

That night the café was fuller and more excited than usual. For a little while Bryden was too full of his own resentment to appreciate the temper of those who surrounded him, but when calm returned to him and his ears caught scraps of conversation he thanked his stars that he had been saved from making a fool of himself, for he could scarcely have chosen a moment less fortunate for declaring his nationality. For the last week the official news-sheet had been stimulating the resentment of Pergusa against the English by publishing a series of documents which proved that the elements of reaction were being supported by English financiers, whose interests demanded a continuance of unrest in Trinacria. The tradition of Anglo-Trinacrian friendship, that ancient political fiction, had gone by the board in the first days of the Revolution, and the resentment that any spirited people must feel at the idea of foreign interference in its domestic affairs had been cleverly used by Massa to prejudice the policy of his enemies.

He had represented their gambling in Trinacrian exchange as a gamble in Trinacrian lives, as indeed it was, and the sensation of the last twenty-four hours had given him another opportunity of creating the hatred and distrust of his enemies, which was the next best thing to support of himself. This was the expected arrival of the grain ships from South America, an event that concerned the purse as well as the stomach of every member of the community. To make the purchase of Argentine grain possible, a loan, or rather a levy disguised under this plausible name, had been raised by the Communist government. Three weeks before, the ships that were to carry the corn had left La Plata. At the Azores an escort of Trinacrian destroyers had met them, and so far all had been well, for they had passed Gibraltar without any interference from the British blockade.

During the days of the convoy's slow approach the official press had insisted on the uncertainty of the venture, for Massa, that born gambler, was hoping in any case to make capital out of the

business. If, as now seemed probable, the blockade should be lifted and the ships arrive, his would be the credit of restoring the nation's food supply: if, on the other hand, the convoy should be diverted, the odium of the whole disaster would fall on his opponents, whom he had carefully proved to be in relation with the hostile power, and the indignation of the moment, carefully handled, might put an end to the hopes of the reactionary party. The latest bulletins declared that the fleet was within three hours sail of Pergusa, but that British cruisers had been sighted off the coast. The matter hung in a nice balance, and if Bryden had involved himself in a brawl it was likely that things would have gone badly with him.

Yet, even though he realised the good fortune of his escape, Bryden's mind was more seriously occupied with the positive infliction of Carlo Farace's back. For the moment the destinies of the grain fleet seemed to him a matter of small importance compared with the fact that a man whose life he had saved refused to recognise him. That wasn't the way in which one civilised being should treat another, even when the other happened to be an Englishman. He dismissed the supposition that Carlo had not remembered his face; for he had recovered consciousness sufficiently to report the failure of the attempt on Massa's life, and must surely have been aware of Bryden's presence. In any case Carlo and his sister must have discussed all the circumstances of the evening, times without number. His attitude, in fact, could be attributed to nothing more nor less than aristocratic pride, a feature of Trinacrian life that Bryden was only just beginning to appreciate, and this irritated him beyond words, so surely was he convinced that every one man—and particularly every Englishman—was as good as another. Small wonder, he thought, that Massa wished to be rid of the lot of them!

His anger rose as he watched the calm profile of Carlo Farace, and particularly the proud moulding of the lips, which is so typical of the Trinacrian features at their best. He burned the more when he saw in Carlo's face so much that reminded him of Maddalena. 'Good God!' he thought, 'if I can't teach the fellow

humanity, it's my duty to teach him manners.' In an access of anger and irritation at which, in a soberer moment, he would have been amused, he determined to force the man to speak. He rose, and pulled round his chair to Carlo's table; but before he could address him the young man had risen and left the terrace.

Once again Bryden stood trembling with rage, but the conspicuousness of his position was happily concealed by the fact that at this very moment a stir was heard in the street and the other occupants of the terrace seemed impelled to follow his example, rising and pressing toward the edge of the pavement to watch the head of a procession pass. In the fringe of the crowd Bryden stood unnoticed by any one but the little waiter at his elbow.

'What is it all about?' he asked.

The waiter shrugged his shoulders. 'It is the old story. Bread. To think that one should be excited about such a thing as bread! What times! They go down to the harbour to greet the grain ships that are now arriving from America. Father Massa has not done so badly!'

It was a curious moment: the well-dressed group on the terrace standing almost in silence: the jangle of the trams hushed by the road's obstruction: the crowd approaching with a rhythmical rumour. It is the nature of Southern peoples, as Bryden knew, to express popular emotion by walking the streets in procession with banners waving and the singing of hymns. But this procession was dumb. No sound came from it but that of a myriad slowly-dragging feet. They passed in their thousands, voiceless, dogged, without enthusiasm, expressing to Bryden the depth of misery into which the Pergusan populace had sunk.

It came to him, observant though he had been, as a revelation. On the surface of the city's life, in streets made gay by perpetual sunshine and by the brightly-coloured piles of fruit and vegetables on the hawkers' barrows, the inner darkness of Pergusa did not appear. Here, under the crudeness of blue arc-lights, in the faces of these thousands of marching men and women, pallid, harassed, drawn with want and uncertainty, it became

awfully apparent, and the more so in that as they passed that café terrace, so many haggard eyes were turned towards it, hungrily blinking at its comfort and luxury. The people on the terrace stared and smoked and smiled, and the people in the procession stared back at them with eyes that seemed to Bryden full of hatred and grudging. There was no end to them. Rank after rank they streamed down toward the sea, with the dumb misery of refugees from a sacked city or the rout of a broken army. Sometimes, but not often, their silence was broken by a cry of 'Down with the bourgeois,' sometimes by a *viva* for 'Father Massa'; but neither cry had in it anything but the weakness of exhaustion and defeat. Each was a formula, and Bryden knew in his heart that if such a thing as action became possible to these dispirited masses the tenour of the cry might be reversed at any moment. To his disturbed imagination it seemed as if the torn flags which some of the demonstrators carried were rags soaked in blood.

'Well, well,' said the little waiter with a cheerful sigh, 'perhaps this is the end of our troubles. Let us hope so! All they want is food, and the ships are bringing God only knows how many quintals of grain . . . at any rate enough to keep their mouths quiet. Fill a man's stomach, signore, and he ceases to think. It is better so. That is the secret of happiness. Therefore let me bring you your dinner before the rush begins. To-night' he confided, 'there are potatoes. To-morrow—who knows?—there may be bread!'

Bryden returned to his table. For several moments the sound of dragging feet continued. It ceased. The tramway bells began to jangle, the wheels to roar and screech over the metals. The black-coated crowd drifted back from the edge of the terrace to the tables. Laughter and the easy talk of men whose mouths are watering for food arose. The waiter wheeled round the corner with his coat-tails swinging and placed Bryden's meal before him.

But Bryden could not eat. His stomach was bitter with the sight of those who had passed. He told himself that he was a supersensitive idiot, but could not be persuaded. It seemed to him as if the spiritual bewilderment that had grown on him with the war and never

left him save in the first delusive months of freedom, had now reached an intolerable pitch. The words of Massa came back to him: 'A blind alley in evolution,' and bitterly he accepted them. He wished that with the same faith he could accept Massa's remedy; but he couldn't: Massa was like a mediæval physician, an empirical, prescribing blood-letting for a patient in the article of death. In his moody, and, if the truth be told, self-centred soul, Bryden played with the idea of a catastrophe—a collision in space: the end of the blind alley. He believed that such a catastrophe would bring relief to the thousands whose pale resentful faces had passed before him under the hissing arcs. Still, in their multitudes, they haunted him, and among them he sometimes saw the face that Maddalena Farace had denied him.

He began to wonder if that intangible creature had anything to do with the blackness of his thoughts: for, serious though he was by nature, he could not believe that pity for the rest of humanity could reduce him to such an abysmal despair, whereas there was no extreme in human emotion that could not be experienced through the love of a woman. He remembered Massa's warning on this very subject, and the careless confidence of his own reply. The memory galled him. Who the devil was Massa that he should dictate to him the conduct of his passions? Under the new bureaucratic order love was the one human activity that could not be controlled by decree. 'Thank God for that!' he thought, 'but if indeed I'm in love with Maddalena Farace . . .' He laughed to himself at the infinite and tragic complications that such an admission would imply, and remembered, almost wistfully, the moment when he had swung along Piccadilly on the top of a motor-bus with the paper that contained the news of Massa's revolution in his pocket, that moment of enthusiasm and freedom: The last, he reflected, in which he had been really free. And yet he knew in his heart that he would not take that freedom in exchange for his present cares; and for this there could be only one explanation. Whatever it might mean to him he now knew that he loved Maddalena Farace.

2

One may fairly say that by virtue of this admission Bryden secured such peace of mind, or rather such an exaltation, as the devout sinner finds in the confessional. He realised, indeed, that his case was more desperate than he had supposed, and yet, as every physician knows, to a man who is mortally stricken there is much virtue in certainty, and a sentence of death may even act as a sedative to an anxious mind. In Bryden's particular disaster were inherent the highest consolations that life holds for any man. Again and again he affirmed to himself the truth that he had now confessed, and in face of it his former preoccupations seemed of little importance. In effect, he was one of those creatures who are never at rest unless they are swayed by some overmastering ideal, and in one moment his love for Maddalena had supplanted those others whose dominion over his mind it had disputed for so long and with such decimating effects. Straightway it became the centre and pivot of his thoughts. As he stepped out into the street, Pergusa itself was no longer a dark and suffering city but the holy place toward which his fate had led him. It did not matter to him if Pergusa starved or if Massa filled its streets with blood so long as he, Bryden, might live in it with the certainty of seeing Maddalena's face. And yet, only a few hours before, he had seriously contemplated leaving the house in which she lived . . . The folly of it: the monstrous blindness! That very night, perhaps, he might see her!

Even his late anger against her brother's insolence dissolved in the flood of a new, magnanimous charity. He began to find excuses for Carlo's behaviour, attributing it to the pardonable timidity of a man involved in political conspiracy, too cautious to recognise his best friend in public. Bryden was even ready to apply this illogical explanation to Maddalena's avoidance of him a few hours before. It was cruel that such complications should be imposed upon her fine and generous spirit,

ridiculous that he should not have made allowances for the delicacy of her position. Some day it would be his privilege to ask her pardon.

He felt a sudden desire to be alone with the night, not in the closed solitude of his own studio, but under the open sky; and with this in his mind he walked deliberately toward a certain public garden, a high place with shabby fountains and avenues of ilex, from which he could look down upon the lights of the city and the harbour and out over the open sea. At this time of the evening he felt sure that he would have it to himself.

There, on a wide terrace, facing seaward, he sat down and smoked. The straight line of a parapet isolated him from the lower town—from everything, in fact, but the dreamy branches above him, the sea's horizon, and the sky. The place was nearly as empty as he had imagined it would be. Ten yards away from him on the left a beggar, stretched full length on a stone seat, muttered in his sleep; all else was silent but for the monotonous trilling of nocturnal cicalas. In no place better could a man sit and meditate on love and destiny, and Bryden stayed there happily, piecing together the precious moments of his meetings with Maddalena, recalling her pose, her voice; searching his memory through and through for any detail that he might have forgotten, forgetting Massa, his sombre mission, everything but the beauty of Maddalena herself. For the moment he did not even consider the possibilities of success in love. His heart was satisfied to overflowing with the present. There is no moment richer than this in all the history of a passion.

In the midst of these reflections he heard a sound like that of distant thunder. He looked up at the sky, for he had not remembered that it was clouded, nor had he been conscious of any flicker of lightning. The vault was full of stars, quietly shining: the horses of the plough hung in a crescent above the northern horizon from which the sound came. Again he heard an angry rumble, and it came to him suddenly that this was not the sound of thunder but of gunfire: a dull percussion of explosions that overlapped each other,

the sound that used to come rumbling up from Arras when his division lay quietly at Ypres. He rose and walked to the parapet. At the same moment the searchlights of the Pergusan defences swung out over the sea like spokes of a wheel, and other nebulous lights began to flicker on the sky beyond the bow of the sea.

He thought: 'Good God! The convoy . . . they've stopped them! He peered northward over the parapet. The pale nebula dimmed and vanished; the firing, too, had ceased; but in a little while he picked out lights approaching the harbour and nearing so rapidly that they could not be anything but those of men-of-war. The Trinacrian escort! Destroyers, making Pergusa as fast as their turbines would drive them!

Already, down in the city, the news was spreading. Within six miles of Pergusa the convoy had been stopped. The escort, obeying Massa's orders, and in any case too weak to fight, had left it to its fate, and the corn for which Pergusa was starving, the corn for which the populace had consented almost cheerfully to Massa's levy, had passed into the hands of the blockading fleet. There was no need for papers to print the news of this disaster. In those swarming streets rumour travels quickly. Bryden, in his solitude, knew that one of the crucial moments of the Revolution had been reached. With something approaching awe he thought of Massa. Eastward beyond that quiet screen of ilex, beyond the dip of the valley, rose the hill of San Constanzo. He thought of the dark fortress and Massa sitting in his bare room with the naval wireless reports spread before him: Massa, pale and determined, straining his intelligence to catch the currents of thought in the streets beneath, waiting to see what direction the passions that he had nourished would take, like a chemist who waits for the realisation of a synthesis that he has planned!

Bryden's new-born generosity embraced the loneliness of Massa and the thwarted passions of the crowds beneath him in the same benevolence. For the moment he had no part nor lot with either. They were as remote from him as though their struggles belonged to the history of Byzantium in the Middle Ages; for neither

time nor space can bind the lover in his moment of realisation. He walked to the other end of the gardens on the hill's eastern slope. The unlit bulk of San Constanzo loomed out of the pit from which the subdued hum of Pergusa arose. Deep down beneath him lights throbbed in the uncertain air like those of fishing boats becalmed at night. He stood there, his mind full of the radiance of Maddalena like a sky bathed in dim moonlight. Thoughts, like racing clouds, were hurried across it, but the image of Maddalena was never wholly hidden.

How long he stayed there he could not tell. Only, at last, he became aware of an increasing stir in the streets, the hum of the city rising slowly into a roar, the quiet lights tossed as by a storm. Suddenly a tongue of red flame leapt into the air; the city was revealed to him, and he knew that this flame was the visible symbol of the hate that he had seen smouldering in so many eyes. Pergusa was in revolt; while he had sat there, dreaming, it was possible that the object of his dreams was in danger, for the passions of an angry crowd make no distinctions and the Palazzo Leonforte might as reasonably be on fire as any other building.

The thought of these dreadful possibilities drove him from the deserted garden and down the slope of the hill toward the centre of the city, but by the time that he had reached level ground the administration had followed its usual plan of throwing the city into darkness. The only light that now reached the streets beat down on them from the lurid reflex of fire in the sky. He soon found himself stumbling along in the thick of a crowd of evil-smelling people that strained forward toward the scene of the conflagration like quails that in spring hurl themselves against lighted nets on the southern coast. Bryden wondered if any of their minds were impelled by a motive as positive as his.

Soon a check came. The foremost fell helpless in the nets. During the last six months the Pergusans had so cultivated the art of erecting barricades that now they rose like mushrooms. Against one of these the crowd had recoiled. Shots shattered the darkness, and they broke this way and that in an agony of haste to escape.

Bryden strained forward through the rout like a man who pushes his canoe against a roaring stickle. On the top of the barricade men were fighting hand to hand. He saw that this way was closed to him, and after invading a blind alley in which fragments of the crowd hung quivering like driftwood in an eddy, he managed to make a detour that promised to bring him nearer to his goal. Here, again, a barricade confronted him. It became clear that now, as before, the scene of greatest violence was being isolated from the rest of the city by a cordon of improvised defences.

Once more he cast a compass, and this time with some success. The new street was clear but for a picket of guards who challenged him as he approached. This time he took the greater risk, leaving the challenge unanswered, and ran for his life. A bullet sang over his head; he ducked and scrambled on hands and knees into another alley which led, as luck would have it, twisting between blocks of shuttered houses, into a narrow street that was unknown to him, yet seemed to run in the direction that he desired. He could not now, he thought, be more than half a mile away from the Street of Palaces. He paused in the darkness to regain his breath. He had lost his hat, though that was no great matter, and his collar and coat-sleeve had been torn by the handling of the crowd. The street was quite empty. All its inhabitants were either trembling behind their shutters or else had flocked to the middle of the city in hope of loot. Still panting he pressed onward, thankful for so long a respite, his will sustained by the thought of his goal.

The street took a sudden turn to the right and he braced himself for some surprise, but here too it was empty save for the figure of a woman who hurried along before him, hugging the wall on the left as if she too were used to such desperate journeys. He thought of the hundreds of unhappy people who might find themselves in his own case, cut off by this sudden insurgence from their homes, tortured by anxieties for those whom they loved. Such, no doubt, was the position of this solitary figure, so rapidly sentimentalised in Bryden's mind: a working woman,

isolated from her children, a daughter troubled for aged parents in the centre of the city. If he hadn't such urgent business of his own, he reflected, it would have been his duty to put himself at her service. Impossible . . . in times like this each must fend for himself. With this inadmissible pity in his mind Bryden steadily overhauled her. A group of workmen, shouting and gesticulating, burst out of one of the archways in front of them. The woman shrank into the shelter of a doorway, and Bryden, passing, caught a glimpse of her face. He stopped, with a cry of joy and wonder, for he saw that it was Maddalena Farace.

3

With a gesture she implored his silence; but already the party whose attention she wished to avoid had passed on brawling up the street. She stood in the doorway like a statue in its niche, her mantle pulled about her face.

'It is all right,' he assured her. 'Thank God, I've found you! You can have no idea of my anxiety.'

She cut him short, hurriedly. 'You have every reason to be anxious. As a foreigner you will be much safer at home. Luckily you are inside the line of barricades. I had better show you the way.'

She put it so candidly that Bryden scarcely knew how to take the superiority of her tone, discounting equally the hardiness of his sex and his eagerness to serve her; and yet the tone was so natural that he could persuade himself that she wasn't, after all, trying to patronise him. He therefore neglected her attempt to get rid of him and continued as though she had not spoken. His father could not have done it better.

'Such a lucky meeting!' he said. 'If you'll believe me I've been hurrying home from the other side of the city, simply with the idea of putting myself at the service of your mother and you in case of any emergency.'

She thanked him without enthusiasm. 'My mother and old Carolina will no doubt be glad of your presence. But we cannot stay here exchanging compliments.

Let me show you the turning. For a few yards our ways lie together. Perhaps you will follow me, with discretion?' She slipped on in front of him, and Bryden, perforce, followed.

'For a few yards?' he repeated, 'Surely you will allow me to accompany you?'

'So many thanks . . . but no. I have to go in another direction. Here is my turning: there is yours. Good-bye, and good fortune!'

He could not take a dismissal so easily. 'Do you expect me to leave you walking alone through the city on a night like this?' She would not stay to listen, and Bryden was forced to sacrifice the remains of his dignity by following her. 'It's impossible for me to leave you,' he protested. 'Can't you see that. It's madness that you should be here at all; but if you must, you shan't be alone. I don't think you can realise the sort of insults to which you lay yourself open.' She raised her head in violent dissent. 'Come now,' he said, 'be reasonable! Tell me where you want to go.' He laid his hand on her arm.

She freed herself quickly from his touch. He felt that he had blundered. 'Please understand,' she said, 'that I don't want your escort.'

Bryden smiled. 'That's as it may be,' he said, 'but you'll have to accept it. It's a question of common sense.'

'Of stupidity! Can't you see that I resent your company?'

'Only too clearly.'

'And yet you're determined to follow me?'

'To accompany you.'

'It's the same thing. You inflict yourself upon me! It's intolerable! You can have no sense of dignity, of decency. You are meddling in affairs that don't concern you.' She faced him with her hands clenched. 'Go . . . I tell you . . . go! You are wasting my time.'

Bryden's eyes devoured her as she stood there tense and determined. 'I'm not sure that she is beautiful after all,' he thought. Her black dress made her seem smaller, slenderer, more definitely pathetic, like one

who had sorrows to mourn. And this aspect of her hardened his obstinacy.

'You can call it whatever you like,' he said, 'but I'm coming with you. I've not the least interest in your affairs, but you're a woman, and I consider it my duty to protect you.'

She gave an exclamation of impatience. 'A woman! That makes no difference in times such as ours. You make yourself personal and offensive. I command you to go!'

'You're talking nonsense,' said Bryden roughly. 'I'm not going to let you out of my sight. You may as well understand it first as last. And don't say that I'm wasting your time. You can go wherever and whenever you like. I shall not embarrass you; but I shall be handy if you need me. Let's say no more about it.'

She turned her eyes on him, searching his face. 'Good God!' he thought, 'how could I ever have questioned her beauty? She's wonderful!' She scrutinised him long and earnestly in the dark. 'I do not know what to make of you,' she said, with a sigh. 'Either you are merely sentimental, like so many Englishmen, or else . . .'

She paused; her eyes accused him. His own eyes wavered, but his heart assured him passionately that in that moment his motives were unmixed and unassailable and that he could answer her with the most complete honesty. 'You've described me perfectly,' he said. 'But I can't help it. Pray accept my devotion in the first capacity.'

She smiled faintly, still doubting, but his heart leapt and took courage. At that moment they both heard a distant stutter of machine-guns. The smile faded; her face became solemn once more, but when she spoke, her voice was softer.

'Very well,' she said. 'I accept you, Don Quichotte, at your own valuation. But though you ride out in search of a romance, I warn you not to look for a romantic ending.' If she had read everything that was in Bryden's mind, she could not have put it more plainly. Then she spoke more quickly, hurried, as it seemed, by

the sound of firing that grew every moment more intense. 'We're losing time. We can't go together. If you follow me it must seem that there is no connection between us. I say this for your own sake.'

'I'm ready. You shall lead the way.'

She drew her shawl about her so that nothing but her eyes and her pale brow was seen. 'I am going to exact a promise from you,' she said, 'and you will not resent it. You will give me your word of honour . . .'

He bowed. 'I shall accept whatever you say.'

'Then you will never mention what happens to-night to any one: the fact that I am here, the house to which you will see me going. When it is over you will forget all about it. You consent?'

'To every condition but the last. I shall never forget it. For the rest you have my word.'

It was a curious moment to which Bryden always looked back with amazement; but as they stood there under the savage firelight of the sky, while the din of firing battered on the confines of their silence, there seemed to him nothing incongruous in this excursion into heroics. No look, no hand-clasp marked their pact. She turned away from him. 'That is well,' she said, slipping away so quickly that, in her black shawl, he could scarcely see her. He followed her, cautiously. Not even the sounds of fighting served to remind him at that instant of Massa, or told him that by his acceptance of this new trust he had wilfully betrayed the old. He followed through the darkness, his body thrilled with exquisite tremors, his mind on fire. For the first moment since his arrival in that unfortunate city he was completely happy. Neither realising his betrayal nor counting its possible cost, he found himself exulting in the mere fact that this confidence might bring him nearer to the bright and dangerous image of Maddalena.

There was even a fascination to him in following her rapid and determined progress. From time to time, without any warning or acknowledgment of his presence, she halted like a creature that hears or smells danger; and Bryden paused too, wondering at an acuteness of instinct in her that was denied him. Yet, while he admired, he was flattered all the time by the certainty

that a moment would come when this fiery creature would be dependent on his resources or his physical strength, since the first thing that his love asked was the privilege of serving her: an ancient and romantic ideal to which his nature was particularly susceptible. Indeed, if he had taken the trouble to think of it, there was something curiously mediæval in the whole setting as well as in the circumstances of their progress.

At first all went well. Bryden gathered that her general direction tended toward the centre of the city, where the fighting was now concentrated, for every moment the rattle of firing seemed nearer and the lights in the sky more lurid. He felt more than ever justified in what he had done, tensely awaiting the emergency that he knew must come soon; but the tortuous course that she followed through the darkest and most unsavoury streets held them always upon the verge of the fighting, in a manner that reminded him of the zigzag saps with which his division had pushed forward their line in the salient five years before.

Deeper and deeper they penetrated into this maze of alleys, passing between blocks of buildings that leaned toward one another so threateningly that it seemed as if the echoes of firing might compel them to totter into ruin over their heads. He realised that Maddalena did wisely in avoiding the wider thoroughfares, knowing, no doubt the points that the guards were likely to select for their barricades; and yet, pausing for a moment in front of a certain rusty gateway, Bryden was assailed by a suspicion that he had trusted too blindly in her certainty. He could have sworn, in fact, that they had hurried past this identical gateway ten minutes before. Perhaps her sense of direction was as faulty as that of most women; perhaps they were travelling in circles, spending their strength and their anxieties for nothing, like squirrels in a revolving cage. Why didn't she consult him? He called to her, but she only made him an imperious sign of silence and was off again. One might as well have followed a marsh-light! The idea mocked him with its implications. The will-o'-the-wisp was a flame that led men to destruction. So be it! What did that matter if he were with her?

There came a lull in the firing, and in the midst of it the mouth of the alley opened to a flood of tawny light against which the figure of Maddalena, halting, was caught in silhouette. Light implied danger, and he hurried forward to find that they had reached the edge of the central square. Standing together, as in a rocky cleft, they looked out across the open space below the gardens toward the Café Greco, or rather to what once had been the Café Greco but was now its blazing skeleton. It was strange for Bryden to see the place in which he had dined quietly an hour or so before given over to such fierce destruction. As they gazed at the spectacle in wonder a floor fell in and flames rose with a roar. The houses on either side of the café were already burning and a fleet of engines, manned by helmeted figures that hurried here and there among the hydrants, were spraying the buildings with jets of water that cracked in the air like whips, leapt up against the barrier of flame and dissolved in clouds of steam that drifted away in a sirocco-mist before the blackness of the hill of San Constanzo.

It seemed as if all the scanty water-supply of Pergusa were being flung in vain upon that core of fire, for the flames abated nothing and the culverts of the square gurgled like runnels on a mountain. All that vast, paved space was flooded. It spread before them like a lake, scattered with the melancholy hulks of foundered trams, dotted with small, sinister islands, the bodies of those who had been killed in the first fighting and now lay soaked where they had fallen. Almost at Bryden's feet a torrent poured into one of the greater sewers. With the fascination of a child playing with water, he saw a black slouch hat, like the one that he had lost, float gaily toward them, whirl in an eddy, then plunge down under the earth. Apart from these pitiable relics the square was empty. The small patch of gardens in front of the Palace nursed a mysterious darkness. Bryden wondered how many human beings cowered there, like animals seeking sanctuary in a wood when grass plains are on fire.

From these sombre reflections Maddalena aroused him. 'This is unlucky,' she said. 'Somehow we

must cross. The fire lies in our way. Perhaps we can skirt the edge of the square. Its emptiness makes it dangerous.'

'Tell me first where you want to go,' he asked her.

She answered freely. 'To a house in the Cheese-market, right under San Constanzo, but there's no time to work round any longer. I had counted on the square being full.'

'But you cannot cross in the open,' he urged.

'We must.'

As she spoke the firing burst out again, this time from a barricade that lay in darkness guarding an entrance on the seaward face of the square. Even the din of firing could not drown the noise of an approaching crowd. She clutched his arm, impulsively. 'We're in luck,' she said. 'It's the procession. The people who marched down to the harbour to meet the convoy are coming back.'

And indeed the transformation that Bryden had imagined in the faces of the hungry masses who had passed his terrace had taken place. All the bitterness and despair of that dumb concourse had risen in one desperate gesture. Back from the harbour the starved and thwarted multitude was swarming, determined, if that one source of food were denied them, to find others by force. During the last hour they had been swelling forward like a slow tide, infiltrating the wine-shops of the small bourgeoisie as they went, gathering courage with the taste of liquor and of loot, looking with a rising eagerness toward the luxurious shops of the Toledo, whose plentiful windows they had stared at on their way down to the sea. So far they had moved slowly and suffered few checks, for the guard were too busy with the tumult that had flared up in the Central Square and gutted its restaurants to think of them; but as Bryden and Maddalena stood hesitating on the edge of that desolation of water and fire, the head of the mob had reached the well-manned barricade that separated them from the principal objects of their lust.

Mob-courage is one of the distinguishing features of the Latin races: in hot blood and in the company of others their meanest elements can achieve heroism;

and so it was that the sleet of bullets that swept the demonstrators inspired them with rage rather than with dismay. In the first minute of their assault the dead lay heaped before the barricade; but here there were too many to kill; by sheer weight of numbers the unarmed multitude of men and women pressed forward.

A machine-gun jammed, and into this single fissure in the defences the point of that gigantic lever was thrust. The weight behind it gathered; the breach widened; the dam burst. At first they tumbled through one by one, carried forward for a moment by the impetus of their emergence, then hanging dazed in the open space; but in less than a second the rest of the barrier had gone and scores poured in, scattering, like leaves whirled through broken sluices, over the drowned piazza; howling, screaming, laughing.

Then, in an instant a new terror came. The maxims that were posted on the roof of the Palace, above the shadowy gardens, opened fire. The more timid elements of the crowd began to run in all directions, stooping low with their hands clasped above their heads in a futile gesture of protection. Many crumpled up and fell as they ran; but there was no end to their numbers, and the field of fire was so wide that the multitude swarming through the breach ran forward stubbornly, stumbling over those who had fallen, seeking the source of their fellows' destruction. The firemen, obeying a swift order, left the restaurants to blaze and turned their hoses on the crowd. They played on them like searchlights, and the mob responded to this form of attack with a howl of resentment, as though they disliked this rain of water more than the deadly sleet of lead. In a second the firemen were mastered; the broken hydrants continued to flood the square with water, and the mob swelled forward like a broken sea into the gardens, mad with a desire to sack the Palace with its nest of gunners.

Maddalena leaned toward Bryden. She spoke, but he could not hear her for the howling of the crowd and the clatter of firing. He listened with his face close to hers.

'We had better cross now,' she said. 'Ready?'

He rose in indignation at such madness. 'It's impossible,' he shouted; but she only smiled. He laid his hand on her arm to restrain her, but she slipped away from him. Already she was threading her way across the square among those who ran and stumbled and fell, and he could do nothing but follow her. She went on swiftly, neatly, as though such a performance were part of her daily life—as though she were endowed with a special form of genius that enabled her to avoid not only the bullets but the bodies of those that fell around her. Now she paused, now wavered, now darted forward, as if the precise dangers of her passage were all charted clearly in her mind. Following her, Bryden became involved in a tangle of gesticulating people. A skinny woman put her arm round his neck and breathed wine into his face, laughing so that tears stood in her eyes. 'Bad weather . . . bad weather, comrade,' she spluttered. 'If one cannot eat one can drink!' She broke off in a cackle. 'Ha, ha! Look how he dances, that one!' 'That one' was a man with a big paunch who spun round, deliberately as it seemed, then settled down with a bullet in his brain. She tugged at Bryden's sleeve, clutched him violently, pulling him down with her. She, too, had finished with laughter. He freed himself, scrambling to his knees. He feared he had lost Maddalena, but as he ran forward he saw her smiling back at him, waiting, as one might wait for a child crossing a road. Seeing that he was safe she moved on, swiftly, securely. What a woman! The word sounded ridiculous. No woman, but a spirit: a Valkyrie riding the storm above the battling of heroes.

Suddenly something fell on him, fell on his whole body like the impact of an enormous stick. He fell. He knew he was hit, but couldn't think where. Consciousness returned. For a second he thought that he had lost his left arm. No. It was still there, though for all the life or power in it it might have been hanging in a pulp. With his other hand he crammed it into the space between the buttons of his coat. He staggered onward, scarcely knowing how. All this must have happened in the space of an instant, for Maddalena was still in sight.

A little later, though still with no clear idea of time, he had joined her on the farther side of the square. She glanced at him quickly. 'You're hit?' she said.

'Yes. If we can find cover for a moment I can put the thing straighter.' She pushed a way before him through a mass of people blocking the mouth of an adjoining street. To Bryden their passage was an agony, for sensation was beginning to return to his numbed tissues and every jostle inflicted on him the pains of hell. She spoke no other word, and he followed as best he could. In a hundred yards the street was clear and he sank down on a doorstep thankfully, for his head was swimming and his legs were no longer his own. He would have given his head for a glass of brandy.

She sat down beside him. 'Let me see,' she said. He submitted, feeling an overwhelming desire to be passive for one moment, to surrender the remains of his will. He closed his eyes, only feeling her unbutton his coat and grasp the arm with firm fingers. 'The bones are both safe,' she said. 'It's lucky that nothing is broken, the bullet must have passed straight through. There doesn't seem to be much blood. That's lucky too. We had better bind it to your side.' He assented, dreamily, being willing to prolong the dream. He heard a sound of tearing silk. She had ripped off a strip from her black veil. 'Tell me if I hurt you,' she said. 'It's nothing . . . nothing,' he murmured. Firmly she bound the injured arm to his side. He thanked her, but his thanks sounded silly, superfluous. 'You had better keep still for half an hour,' she said. 'I will get on with my business. Then I will try to rejoin you.'

This announcement really awakened him. 'No, no,' he said. 'I'm quite fit to go through with it. I can walk as well as you can.'

She watched him gravely as he rose to his feet. No doubt he was a haggard spectacle.

'Very well,' she said. 'It shall be as you wish.'

They set off again, but more slowly. He felt that she was regulating her pace out of consideration for him and thanked her in his heart. He knew that by this

time they could not be very far from her goal, and indeed was congratulating himself on something of an achievement when they ran right into a picket of one of the volunteer detachments, a kind of special constabulary, that Massa had enrolled for service in times of riot. One of these ran forward to meet them, shouting:

'Stop! You cannot go this way. The road is closed.'

Maddalena addressed him in dialect. 'Look! This man is wounded. I am only taking him to a doctor in the Cheesemarket.'

The fellow began to bluster. 'Those that walk the streets on a night like this only get what they deserve. Besides, there are plenty of doctors in Pergusa. You'd better get back and double quick!'

'But that, sir, is impossible. At the end of the street they are still fighting. You can hear for yourself. What harm can we do?'

Another of the detachment had slouched up. 'Better ask them for their papers,' he said. 'Why doesn't the fellow speak for himself?'

'I'll call the corporal,' said the first, in doubt.

He left them, and in a moment returned bringing with him a gigantic figure wearing a red brassard. Bryden's heart leapt between alternations of hope and fear when he recognised his former host. He took the matter into his own hands, going forward to meet him. 'You know me,' he urged, 'the friend of Signor Rufo, at the Hotel Bristol? You remember Signor Rufo wrote to me there, and recommended me to you? I was hit in the arm approaching the Square. This woman is kindly conducting me to a doctor near San Constanzo. Is there any reason why I should not pass?'

The landlord blinked at him. 'I have not seen you for some days,' he said. 'Let me tell you that there is a letter waiting for you in my office. Possibly it is a matter of urgency. You had better see as soon as your arm is dressed.' He turned to Maddalena. 'What doctor are you taking him to?' He surveyed her closely through the slits of his eyelids.

'To Doctor Bonomi in the Cheesemarket,' put in the first guard officiously. 'The woman's right. My wife says there isn't a better in the section.'

'He is so kind,' Maddalena echoed, 'and with him one does not spend too much.'

The landlord blinked—Bryden could not be sure that a wink was not included in the gesture—'Then you, my dear, had better take his arm. The man's as white as a bladder of lard.'

Maddalena thanked him with the most florid exaggerations. He turned his back on them and rolled off to a chair that he had procured from one of the nearest houses. She slipped her hand into Bryden's arm, and they passed on together; yet, even though no word was spoken, he felt that in some way the quality of her touch was changed—that where, before the barrier, it was given of her own free will, it now lingered under protest. He had reason to congratulate himself on the rightness of his instinct, for no sooner had they passed out of earshot into the darkness of the street than she took away her hand and stopped him. Bryden, still a little shaky with his wound, was taken off his feet by the suddenness of her change.

'Who was the fat man that knew you . . . the corporal, the one you spoke with?' How did you become acquainted with him? Who is Signor Rufo? Why should a letter be waiting for you at this hotel?' She rattled out her string of questions with the rapidity of the maxims in the square, scarcely giving Bryden time to reply that the fat man was his late landlord, that he had become acquainted with him by lodging in his hotel, a modest house well suited to his pocket; that Rufo (truly enough) was a man whom he had known years ago in England who had recommended him to the house and with whom he rarely corresponded; that the letter now waiting for him at the hotel was in all probability sent to him from some such friend as this Rufo, whom he admitted to be now in Trinacria. He had his work cut out to keep his end up. In the intervals of this quick sword-play he managed to pull himself together, determining to press her in return. 'Why do you ask so many questions and so seriously?' he began, smiling, as though he were treating the whole affair lightly.

'Because I don't believe a word that you've told me.'

'Well, that's a pity,' he urged, 'for you're doing me a quite unnecessary wrong. At anyrate, you should tell me why you doubt my word.'

'Ask me why I was ever fool enough to trust you and it will be more to the point! The thing is clear. What are you, who call yourself an Englishman, doing in Pergusa at this time? A man doesn't choose the centre of a revolution for his health! Why have you persisted . . . persisted in finding your way into our confidence, living on our doorstep, frequenting the very restaurant at which my brother sits, lying in wait for me —as I've seen you . . . don't think I'm blind!—even waylaying me in the streets on a night such as this? Do you wish me to believe that our meeting to-night was an accident, to pretend that you hadn't followed me from the door of our house? No doubt it all sounds very gallant and quixotic; but it takes more than a devotion that hasn't exactly been encouraged to compel a man to cross a square swept with bullets. You're not a coward—I'll give you credit for that—but I'm not prepared to believe that you faced death for the pleasure of my company.'

She stood up to him, vibrating with this strange dark passion. Her words came quickly but beautifully formed, so that he was conscious of the quality that for want of a better word he had called fineness beneath this harsh and violent exterior. She stopped and drew away from him, breathing quickly. The sound of her breath, coming in swift gasps, made him more than ever aware of her physical presence; her very violence provoked him to take her in his arms, to crush her, to subdue her. Considering that the man was on his last legs, stung by the element of truth in her accusation and yet indignant and eager to defend the honesty of his present motives, it is a wonder that he controlled himself sufficiently to remind her of his promise of secrecy.

'That?' she cried, scornfully. 'No! A man who risks his life doesn't stop at a simple lie. Your eagerness when you saw your friend at the barrier betrayed you. You did not wait for him to speak. No! you must give him his cue! You put the words into his mouth.

The Hotel Bristol: your correspondent Rufo. I don't believe he had ever heard of either before you spoke of them. A man is known by his friends, and those who have friends among men who wear the red brassard are no company for me!'

A gleam of hope came into Bryden's mind. By doubting the veracity of things that he was able to prove she had played into his hands; but while he was searching his mind for some way in which to display his innocence, nature supplied him with a stronger than any he could have found. For the last ten minutes blood had been soaking away into his sleeve. Suddenly, in spite of an effort to sustain himself, he sank down fainting on the pavement. In an instant Maddalena was at his side. However deep may have been her distrust, her code of conduct would not allow her to desert a man who had been wounded in her company, with the bare possibility of good intentions, and was now on the point of bleeding to death. She knelt on the pathway beside the unconscious Bryden, stripping the bandage from his arm, adjusting it tightly, with what skill she possessed, above the site of the wound. Bryden lay still with his eyes closed.

She knelt beside him, gazing at his face, searching it for the confirmation of her suspicions, and in that moment Bryden had need to be grateful to his father for the fact that he had supplied him with a favourable argument in the shape of features which it would have been difficult to associate with the work that he had chosen, a face that almost compelled an admission of the perverse and obstinate honesty that had already played such havoc with his life. The sight filled Maddalena with a sudden distrust of her own hasty judgment, and to this treacherous emotion was added another: pity for the creature who lay there so completely at her mercy. For her, even more than for Bryden, this romantic experience was of an enthralling novelty; for in all her life she had known no men but her father and her brother, whom she had accepted as an integral part of her life, and one other to whom she was bound by the ties of a political faith rather than any human relationship. Her eyes surveyed Bryden with favour,

and the new suspicion that she might have done him an injustice allowed her pity to make insidious advances in her mind. In an instant her fiery and romantic nature was eager to make amends for any injustice she had done him, harried by the possibility that he might already be beyond the reach of reparation. It thrilled her with thankfulness when at last he opened his eyes. Bryden saw her face bending over him and was content. By a strong effort of will he succeeded in raising himself upon his elbow.

'I've made a fool of myself,' he said feebly. 'You must excuse me.'

'Your wound had begun to bleed. I think it is secure now.'

He thanked her. 'Then I must not keep you. I know that your business is urgent.'

This concern on his part was too much for her growing remorse. 'Do you think that I can leave you?' she said.

He did not thank her. The only thing in his mind was a desire to complete at all costs the service that he had promised her. 'Let me try my legs,' he said. 'I think my weakness is over. I want to keep my bargain, if you will let me.' For a moment he sat with his head in his hands, then, bracing himself to the effort, he rose to his feet. She watched him, anxiously, as he propped himself against the nearest wall. 'Yes,' he said. 'I can manage. Let us go.'

'Are you sure that your strength will carry you?'

'Yes. But I'm afraid I can't be of much use to you.'

She could say nothing. They moved off together, Maddalena anxiously watching his steps, and so they proceeded for a couple of hundred yards. Suddenly Bryden pulled himself up with a laugh. 'Here is the first of my credentials,' he said, pointing to the sign of the Hotel Bristol, under which he unexpectedly found himself. 'If you'll allow me, I'll try to produce the second.'

She made no reply. Bryden hammered at the closed door. It was opened for the space of a couple of inches by a timid chambermaid carrying one of the square oil-lanterns that the Pergusans use. 'The master is not at home,' she said hurriedly. At that moment an unusually violent burst of firing echoed in the street,

and she tried to shut the door in their faces, as though she feared that the sound itself might do her some injury. She gave a cry of despair, for Bryden had already thrust his foot into the opening. She leaned her negligible weight against the door in a vain attempt to keep him out.

Bryden tried to reassure her, begging her to be sensible. 'Don't you remember me?' he said. 'I have just seen the *padrone*. He told me that there was a letter waiting for me in his office and asked me to call for it.'

At this the chambermaid abandoned her attempts to close the door; she peered at Bryden curiously, then, apparently recognising him, asked him to enter. 'You too,' she added, with a scornful glance at Maddalena. They entered and she closed the door behind them. Bryden took the lantern from her. In the letter-rack of the *padrone's* bunk he found a note from Massa. It was addressed to him in the name with which Maddalena must already have been made familiar by old Carolina. He handed it to her in silence. She read the address; then, with meek eyes, gave it back to him.

'There appear to be some elements of truth in my story,' he said. She did not answer.

Then Bryden did a wild thing. How much it was due to his light-headedness, to the bravado of a moment, or to the incurable, sentimental honesty of his nature that could not tolerate any relation with this woman that was not based upon the utmost candour, it is hard to say. Once again he offered Massa's letter to Maddalena. 'Take it,' he said. 'If you wish to know more of the truth you had better read it.'

He thrust it into her hand. She took it mechanically and remained staring at the address. 'Open it! Read it!' Bryden insisted. In that instant the whole of his immediate happiness hung in the balance. He did not care. Without a word she handed the letter back to him, her eyes imploring his forgiveness. In spite of the moment's seriousness Bryden gave a laugh. He knew that the laugh would wound her, but it was the only way in which he could express thankfulness for his escape from the consequences of his perversity and

his triumph in her submission. The maid stood watching them, suspicious, puzzled by this strange scene between her late lodger and this woman of the streets, more anxious than ever to see the last of them both. Bryden gave her back her lantern and thanked her.

'Then we will go,' he said, putting the letter back into his pocket. 'I think you must have stopped the bleeding. I'm ready for anything.'

They passed out into the street, hearing the bolts shot back behind them with a relieved and feverish haste.

'You shall go straight to the Cheesemarket,' he said. 'I will wait for you at the end of the street, so that you may be certain that I am not following your movements.'

'Ah, don't!' she whispered. 'It isn't kind to make me too ashamed.' Again she laid her hand on his arm, and Bryden's head swam for other reasons than loss of blood. His pride in himself rose at the thought that he had broken hers, and yet, beneath this pardonable exultation, he was not happy. 'A hollow triumph,' he thought: 'the triumph of a lie!' How would it have been if she had taken him at his word and read Massa's letter? Then the touch of her hand would have been something worth having. At present it expressed a certain confidence, concern for his weakness, anxiety to be forgiven: things that meant nothing to him because of the manner in which they had been exacted. He could not even be sure that they meant as much as that. How could he tell that she was not still doubting him in her heart? What if her gesture, so appealing and apparently so spontaneous, were really an expression of fear? What if her prudence were forcing her, against her will, to humour him, to coquette with him? Before these doubts his momentary elation subsided, and since, in love, the unattainable is always the most precious, the uncertainty of her submission made him more in love with her than ever. For consolation his mind fondled the idea of her magnanimity, and yet he saw how little indeed his bravado had risked. How could so fine a creature as Maddalena have accepted the offer that he had made her? If he had ever imagined it possible he had wronged her.

They came, at last, to the corner of the Cheesemarket.

He knew the street well, for it was one of ancient and singularly beautiful houses sheltering under the protection of the castle whose bases it encircled. Here the volume of firing that had never yet ceased was thrown back in sullen echoes from the glacis above their heads, but the street itself was as empty and as quiet as all the others in that quarter. Bryden halted by a gateway in which an oil-lamp hung dismally burning.

'I shall wait here till you return,' he said. 'You will find me probably sitting on the doorstep.'

She hesitated: 'Won't you come with me?' she said. 'I don't like leaving you.'

'No, no . . . I have no desire to penetrate your mysteries.'

'There is nothing that I wish to conceal from you.'

'I acknowledge the compliment; but what I suggest will be better.'

He turned away, but she followed him, not angry at his refusal, but anxious to redeem herself from the ignoble attitude of which her mind accused her, to return him gesture for gesture. Her nature would not allow him to exceed her in generosity. Her action was in keeping with the highly-coloured nature of their adventure, a natural piece of heroics.

'At least you must listen to me,' she said. 'I am going to a house on the left-hand side of the street. The number is seventy-five. If you wish it I will add the name of the person whom I am going to see.' Thus, having satisfied her sense of equality in confidence, she left him.

Bryden, a prey to ironical reflections, watched her as the darkness swallowed her. He thought: 'Because I have acted toward this woman with the instincts of a lover I have become possessed of the information that I was seeking as Massa's agent, but since I'm really in love with her the information is worthless. I can't use it . . . and there we are!' His mind turned toward Massa's letter still lying unopened in his pocket. 'I may as well tear the damned thing up,' he thought; but curiosity got the better of his intention, and he ripped the envelope open with his teeth. The note was short and definite:—

'Do not be discouraged,' he read, *'if things go slowly. Your information is scanty, and not valuable in itself, but it shows that you are putting yourself in the way of finding more. I am anxious to establish some connection between the Palazzo Leonforte and a house in the Cheese-market, number 75, occupied by the Socialist ex-deputy Vaccari, who is believed to be in sympathy with the D. of R. Courage!'*

He tore the letter into fragments and pushed them through a grating in the gutter, and with them he disowned the whole problem of his duty toward Massa and the Republic, dismissing it from his mind as a matter of small importance compared with his personal dilemma; knowing, alas! that before long he must be forced to return to it. On one point, at any rate, his mind was clear. Whatever the future might dictate to him his promise to Maddalena must stand. Whatever had happened or might happen to him that night must be blotted from his official memory. As for the future, it seemed to him as dark as the sombre gulf into which he had watched her figure disappear. He crouched down on the doorstep, sitting with closed eyes, haunted by the memory of Maddalena's face.

In a few moments, as it seemed, he heard her voice. She had approached him so silently that this too seemed to him a part of his dream. He felt as though she must have surprised his troubled thoughts.

'I am ready,' she was saying.

He did not question her on the success or failure of her mission. He rose in silence, and the movement reminded him of the boring pain in his arm that had been no more than the dolorous background of his thoughts.

'Then, as a matter of form, we had better find the doctor,' he said. 'My friend may make inquiries. What was the fellow's name? Bonomi?'

'I have been thinking about that,' she replied seriously, 'and if we can manage without it I think it will be better to avoid any contact with your friend's doctor. It is enough to know that he is on good terms with the civic guard to understand that a civilian wounded in this fighting is safer out of his sight. Don't

mistake my motive: it's not only your safety that I'm considering. I am thinking of myself and my friends. Particulars of your address would probably be taken; perquisitions might be made; your rooms in the palazzo searched. You understand?'

Bryden understood. Also he recognised, with a faint glow of pleasure, her almost pathetic anxiety to be honest with him, to strip herself of those shreds of insincerity with which men and women have agreed to hide the nakedness of their self-interest.

'As soon as we reach home,' she added, 'my mother and I will dress your wound for you. Unfortunately, we are not without experience of such things.'

Bryden consented. The wound, though damnably painful now that the bruised tissues were recovering sensation, was reasonably clean and simple. He knew that with disinfection and rest it should heal without trouble. 'Very well,' he said. 'I think your suggestion is a wise one. The sooner we are home the better.'

They prepared once more to face the system of defences that still isolated them from their own quarter. Bryden submitted himself to Maddalena's guidance, guessing that if any way in Pergusa were well known to her it must be that which led from the Palazzo Leonforte to the deputy Vaccari's house. No doubt he was right, for she steered an intricate course with certainty; but before they had gone far another complication was added to the horror of their night's adventure.

The struggle in the centre of the city had by this time become so intense and the passions of the mob seemed to be turning so definitely against the government forces, that some unknown authority—the responsibility was later placed upon the head of Gennaro, Massa's Minister of Marine—ordered the men-of-war in the harbour to open fire upon the centre of the city where the crowd was thickest and most threatening, and to throw a barrage between the struggling masses and the castle of San Constanzo, which had now become the principal object of their anger. Bryden started as the first shell came screaming over their heads. It burst in the air with a terrific detonation, spraying the gardens of the Central Square

with shrapnel. A curious hush followed. Then came others, methodically ranged, shrapnel and high explosive intermingled. Maddalena clutched at Bryden's arm: to her it was a new experience. 'What is it?' she cried.

'They're shelling the city. Perhaps it is the ships of the blockading squadron; but the forts don't reply, so I think it must be your own fleet.'

'It's impossible,' she cried. 'Even Massa could not order such a blind butchery!'

Her dazed incredulity and indignation reflected the feelings of all Pergusa. With those shots had begun the Red Week of Massa's terror, a slaughter that will be remembered in history along with the Eve of Saint Bartholomew and the Sicilian Vespers.

The nature of the bombardment soon became clear to Bryden. 'It's a fixed barrage,' he said. 'If we don't try to pass it I do not think we run any risk. It seems to be mostly shrapnel, so in any case we had better take cover. Of course, we can't attempt to reach the palazzo.'

'I'm not frightened,' she assured him.

'That's because you don't understand. I should think it is done with the idea of clearing the streets. People who stay indoors are reasonably safe. Probably it won't last long. Where can we shelter? That is the only question.'

A refuge soon suggested itself. A hundred yards to their left the towers of the Byzantine cathedral stood up, illumined by the flashes of bursting shells. By the time that they reached the narrow close in front of it they found a crowd of half-clad people huddled before its great bronze doors, driven to that place of refuge, some by superstitious dread and a belief in the power of the city's patron saint, some by the reasonable supposition that so great an artistic treasure must be spared. From every alley in the quarter women were dragging sleepy, half-naked children toward the doors of the sanctuary, and among them Bryden and Maddalena entered.

In all that vast building there was no light but the yellow flames of oil-lamps burning in the niches of waxen images on either side of the nave. The pointed

granite pillars supporting the Saracen arches of the roof reached upward into an absolute gloom. The place was stony cold like a cavern under the earth. Bryden shivered. He was only looking for the moment in which he could rest his limbs, and it seemed to him trifling and incongruous to see his companion wait behind a crowd that clustered about a stoup of holy water. The incident reminded him dimly of his own childhood, for when his father had married Bianca Leonforte it had been arranged that her children should be nurtured in their mother's faith, and though his aunt had discouraged it, Bryden himself was nominally a Catholic. Even so the action of Maddalena made him realise how little, in fact, he knew of her.

She took her turn with her ragged companions, crossed herself, and rejoined him.

'I know of a place where we can rest,' she whispered. 'Follow me.'

She led the way up the nave into the north transept, opening a door that led into a small but sumptuously decorated chapel. In the centre of it, stretched upon a sarcophagus of porphyry, lay the figure of a mailed knight with the cross-hilt of a long sword on his breast. The walls were hung with tapestries, and on the altar three votive candles, that should last the night, burned, lighting in the tapestry of the walls tones that gave an illusion of warmth and comfort.

Once again she left him, and knelt, praying silently, on the steps of the altar. In that moment he remembered the formal devotions of Carmela, the vile oleograph of San Constanzo that used to hang beside her bed in Chelsea. He had always smiled to himself at Carmela's religion, knowing how little it was removed from the superstitions of a savage. But he could not smile at Maddalena. Her devotions, it seemed to him, were in keeping with the ancient civilisation of which she was a symbol. Just so, he fancied, might the original of that ponderous marble figure which lay gazing from its tomb into the painted roof have knelt before the selfsame altar six hundred years ago. She returned to him. He was conscious of a new and dignified security in her eyes, and though he could not share

in her emotion it struck him as in some way admirable —admirable, yet terribly remote: he had never before so deeply appreciated the distance of centuries that separated them.

She pulled a heap of cushions toward him, and insisted that he should prop himself up with them against the porphyry tomb. She sat down beside him. 'Here we can be quiet,' she whispered.

It was only a relative quietude. Every second, as it seemed, the fabric of the church was shaken by the detonations of shells exploding in the sky. Their flashes played like lightning through the clerestory, throwing an amber glow over the golden ground of glass-mosaic with which the nave was roofed. To Bryden it seemed a distant and ineffective thunder, but not more distant than the whispering echoes with which the great church was filled by the people who moved unceasingly over its pavement, whose footsteps were like the sifting of fine shingles and their voices like a murmur of waves. Yet in no mountain solitude could they have been more alone.

To Bryden's mind the events of this night always retained the unworldly quality of a dream. He lay there, quietened, as it were, by the placid flames of the three candles, burning steadily, unmoved by any breeze, soothed by the calm of Maddalena's presence, and haunted by a vague sweetness of incense which he associated with the perfume of the woman beside him. His eyes became accustomed to the unreal light. They drank in one by one the alien beauties of the chapel's decoration, and particularly the centre-piece of a triptych that backed the altar, an Assumption, in which the pale and placid face of the Virgin reflected the features of Maddalena Farace as in a mirror. She, indeed, kept a silence as deep as that of her painted likeness, and it seemed to Bryden as if it would have been sacrilegious to break it. His restless mind became engrossed in deciphering the legend that surrounded the porphyry sarcophagus. *Roger di Cammarata,* he read—a queer combination of the Norman and Trinacrian—and a date: 1262. The name seemed remotely familiar to him; familiar, too, the symbol of the crest

which was embodied in the carving of the monument, an eagle with a viper writhing in its claws; but his mind was too feeble to search for the origins of a memory, and he contented himself with vague reflections on the life of this adventurer bearing the cross above scorched Saracen plains.

For an hour or more the bombardment continued steadily. He turned to Maddalena. 'They can't go on with this sort of thing without doing a good deal of damage,' he said at last.

She had been sitting with her head in her hands, so quiet that one might easily have imagined that she was asleep. Bryden's words awakened her to a sudden, surprising intensity. Perhaps his tone had betrayed something of the lightness with which the most sensitive men, hardened by the hammers of war, have forced themselves to speak of its horrors.

'Damage!' she cried. 'Is this a spectacle, an adventure? To me it's just as if every one of these shells were bursting in my heart. It maddens me . . . makes me want to take my life in my hands, to offer it as a sacrifice for this city. Waiting for a miracle! Can you understand? No, it's ridiculous. My life isn't worth a miracle, and in any case miracles don't happen nowadays. But if one could do something desperate! No sacrifices are really wasted. I believe in them. Jeanne d'Arc at the stake: Corday under the guillotine . . . Why shouldn't I? You think I'm talking wildly? Yes, but you're a foreigner! I suppose you've only known Pergusa as this hell. If you had known the paradise that we have lost!'

And she began to speak more calmly of her old life up in the hills above the city; of a gentle, pastoral happiness: her father, her mother, Carlo and herself living peacefully in the midst of their lands as their forbears had lived for hundreds of years. 'There was nothing of the slave-driver about my father,' she said. 'He was a good man, a brave man, in the prime of his age. His people were his children; nothing in their lives was too small for him. If their crops failed they came to him for help. If they quarrelled, he made their peace; if they were sick they looked to him. It's true

enough that not all Trinacrian landowners were like him. Many of them had no love for the land. They lived in the cities and let their bailiffs grind out money from the country people. Of course it was wrong—we know that—but even then it wasn't altogether their fault: it was simply the system in which they had been brought up, and the system was as old as Rome. They were fortunate, too. When the risings first began they were safe in their town houses. They lost their lands, but they didn't see what we saw. We, who had lived among our tenants, were left to face them. We weren't afraid. We knew we had nothing to fear from them. And it wasn't our own people who came against us. It was those who had been ground down and oppressed on our neighbours' lands, and men from much farther away. They moved over the island like a flight of locusts, stripping everything as they went, ravenous, sparing nothing, thousands . . . My father went out to meet them. He kissed us and told us that there was no reason for fear. They killed him on the steps of the terrace. I saw it . . . I saw it! He was so simple, so good. Then all the crowd suddenly went mad, like a pack of wolves that have tasted blood . . . clothed in skins they were, with red eyes, just like wolves, howling . . . Oh, don't wonder that I'm bitter! Everything went in a single second: all the small things that had made my life: all my past going up in the flames of the house. Even now I can't forget it for long. Every fire that I see is like that fire. It goes on burning in my heart!'

Then she told him quietly how she and Carlo and her mother had escaped, hiding all night in the olive-groves, too torn by anger and grief for any terror. She and Carlo were young and could bear it; but the mother was old and had never suffered any hardship in her life. It was wonderful that she should have lived through it: perhaps the extremity of her grief made her too numb to feel. By day they hid in the olives: at night they groped their way down toward Pergusa. The only food that they tasted was a little goat's milk that a woman gave them. Although they did not know it they need not have been afraid, for they were passing

through a district that the trouble had not yet reached. They knew that the woman with the goats would not accept money from them, such is the tradition of hospitality, but in any case they had no money to give her, not a single copper coin. In their home they never had need of money.

So, on the second night, they entered Pergusa. They went in the dark to the house of a friend. It was empty, sacked, gutted. Maddalena and her mother stayed behind on a doorstep while Carlo went to look for other friends. He could not find one. Some had taken refuge in the country; some were hiding in other quarters of the town; some had been butchered, like the first, in their palaces. Then they remembered Carolina, an old servant of the family who had married a peasant made prosperous by the wine-trade. Her husband was dead, but before he died he had sunk his money in the purchase of the empty palazzo. Even before the war many of these great houses had been bought by speculators and split up into tenements. She took them in, and there, thanks to her, they had lived meanly on the proceeds of their jewellery. Maddalena herself had added a little to their income by selling pictures, copies of photographs of bourgeois families and portraits of men in Massa's uniform.

'When orders do not come in I make pictures of Trinacrian subjects. Those of women sell best. You're an artist,' she said. 'How you would laugh at my pictures! I should be ashamed for you to see them. But do you wonder that this firing maddens me? The brutal waste! Hatred of the thing that has stamped all the sweetness out of life! Perhaps you feel that I am uncontrolled? Well, we are different: you're an Englishman; the sight of passion makes you uncomfortable and ashamed. But I have no shame. When I hate, I hate. The idea of vengeance is in my blood. It fills me, and I believe it is holy. It's the only way out of my sufferings: I can't rest till it is accomplished. An eye for an eye: a tooth for a tooth! Any other morality in me would be an unnatural thing, a sham.' She paused. 'I don't

know why I've told you all this,' she said. And then: 'Yes . . . I suppose I do know the reason. I want to warn you that my company is dangerous, as your wound has proved to you already.'

She trembled and was silent. Bryden could not answer her. Every word that she spoke had moved him. Her story fell on a heart already made sensitive by his bitter doubts and pity for the things that he had seen; but he could not find words that would not have sounded flat and tepid in the face of her tingling passion. He prayed that she would understand his silence.

And then, almost as if her tale had been the last expression of the city's suffering, wrung from it by the terror of the bombardment, the guns ceased fire. A hush fell on the town. Bryden touched her arm. 'Let us go,' he said, and she, without answering, veiled her face and followed him down the nave of the cathedral among the throng of people who still cowered there in fear. They emerged into a night of amazing silence and beauty. Many new fires had been started by the shells, and the light of the burning city spread over the slopes of the mountains that guarded it, dimming the star-light. Without further hindrance they found their way back to the Street of Palaces.

The Seventh Chapter

THE PORTRAIT

I

BELL after melancholy bell was tolling midnight when Bryden re-entered his studio. He could not think of sleep, nor yet return to any of his normal activities. He stood there as bewildered as Adam expelled from Paradise, confounded by the barrenness of everyday life as presented to him by the aspect of that ill-lighted room. The canvases, brushes, and colours with which it was littered, objects that usually welcomed him with soothing reminders of the one unchanging interest of his life, served only to irritate him. For the time being his energies were centred in a passionate endeavour to continue the enchanted existence that had been ended when the doors of the Farace's apartment closed behind him. With nothing less could he be contented. Until the moment when he should set eyes on Maddalena again he must live as best he could on memories of her; and in this case memory was more than usually a cheat.

He tried, without success, to recall the tones of her voice, her features, her eyes; but the face of the Madonna in the Cammarata chapel, absorbed, no doubt, by a deeper consciousness, remained more vivid than the other, and even replaced it. All, indeed, that he could remember with clearness was the shape of her fingers as he had watched them busy with the dressing of his wound, and even in this picture the hands of her mother, idle hands with the soft flaccidity of age and not in the least resembling those of Maddalena, obtruded themselves. The earlier part of the evening was now nothing but a nightmare, a picture shattered by gunfire, blurred with blood and fire, whose reality he would have doubted but for the incessant pain of his damaged arm; so he

clutched the more eagerly at visions that were recent in his memory, telling them over and over again to fix them in his mind.

He remembered the echoing silence of the *cortile*, the sound of their footsteps as they climbed the marble stairs; a whispered entreaty from Maddalena that he should go slowly and not overtax himself; his own voice reassuring her; an answering smile. At the door of her studio she had stopped. 'Let me go first,' she said. 'I don't want to alarm them.' She disappeared. Then, through the closed doors, the rumour of a whispered colloquy, with no distinguishable words but an impulsive 'Thank God!' from Carlo, and a faint stir, as though somebody or something mysterious were being hidden. The last idea sounded fantastic in his present mood; yet at the time it had been vivid and disturbing. Next, Maddalena was standing in the doorway, beckoning. He entered. Her mother came toward him with her hand outstretched. Carolina, at the same moment, hurried from the room, her face twitching with suppressed tears. Carlo was standing with his back to the window, pale, and very handsome. The mother was holding his hand, speaking words that seèmed to beg his pardon for her previous slight. He himself was trying to put her at her ease, begging her to say no more: 'It was natural, the most natural thing in the world.' Carlo, too, came forward. 'I also have apologies to make,' he said. 'You now realise how careful one must be.' The apology was frank enough, and yet even in that generous moment Bryden couldn't be sure that it was unmixed with patronage.

'You must sit,' the old lady urged him. 'Pray, pray, make yourself comfortable.'

Maddalena had thrown her veil aside. How could he ever have imagined that she was not beautiful? He heard her voice giving crisp orders to Carolina. 'Iodine . . . in a green bottle. It is with the bandages in the left hand drawer. I think there is old linen there too.'

'The kettle is near boiling,' sighed the old woman in the next room.

'A drink of brandy, a spoonful,' said the mother. He gulped it down thankfully. 'Your daughter . . .' he said, 'you mustn't forget her!'

'Ah, Maddalena can look after herself.'

A curious, an indefinitely hostile atmosphere. All these people—he excepted Maddalena—were doing their duty by him with equal courtesy and kindness. There it began, and there it ended. They were solicitous for him, as they would surely have been for a wounded animal, but in all their attentions he sought in vain for any human relationship, for anything, in fact, but the most perfect manners. Even Carolina was only obeying the commands of her masters. He was thankful that Maddalena, at least, seemed unaffected by this attitude not so much of distrust as of negation. It was an unspeakable relief when she came toward him bringing with her a basin of warm water, tinged blue with sublimate, and strips of linen with which to bathe his wound. His heart leapt to see her so different from the others. After all she was the only one of the lot that really mattered to him.

Carlo had returned to his post in front of the window; the mother hovered round with a polite affectation of concern, condoling, anxious, yet always with an eye on her son, as though she looked to him for instructions. Carolina, her face still puckered with unfathomable emotions, stood watching, like a faithful dog. Very gently, without words but carefully watching Bryden's features for the least sign of suffering, Maddalena loosened the tourniquet and began to clean the wound. The bleeding had stopped, and when he glanced at it Bryden was amazed to see how small an affair had occasioned such great pain. The bullet had passed clean through the mass of pronator muscles that he had developed so quickly by shovelling coal aboard the *Boston Hall*. When the blood was sponged away the wound seemed trifling compared with the ugly damage of the fragment of high explosive shell that had lodged in his thigh at Ypres. The touch of Maddalena's fingers on his naked skin affected him strangely. He closed his eyes, so that he need not see so many faces, so that darkness might isolate this sensation from the

rest. Once only he opened them, and met those of Maddalena, still seeking his face for any signs of pain. In the lamplight her pupils seemed large and mysterious. He dared not hold her eyes with his own for more than a moment, but it seemed to him that she flushed faintly, covering her confusion with a whispered question: 'I'm afraid I'm hurting you?'

'No, no,' he murmured.

'You are very brave,' put in the mother warmly. But he knew that what she said meant nothing whatever, and caught sight of Carlo, lolling in his cloud of cigarette smoke with a sardonic smile on his lips. 'How different she is from the others!' he thought.

Was she different? Such was the question that now troubled him beyond any other in the solitude of his own room. Could he hope that what she had done for him was really more than an expression of good manners, only a little more practical than the babble of her mother, more gracious than Carlo's apology? The room returned him no answer, nor could he find one from any lips but hers. Ten minutes before, she had closed the door behind him, had given him, for an instant, her hand, and told him to call next morning at the studio for his dressing. She had not thanked him, like the others. He was glad that she had not thanked him, even though she had more reason to do so, for it made him feel that she was a creature to whom conventional words did not come glibly. This circumstance, together with the problematical blush, was the only consolation that he could set against the disturbing reception given him by her relatives. The first implied that she accepted him as a human being: the second . . . He could not be sure that it had any existence outside his imagination, and for confirmation of either he must wait until the hour of the next morning that she had fixed for his visit. To-morrow! It consoled him a little to reflect that 'to-morrow' was already 'to-day.'

Any reasonable man would surely go to bed. He undressed slowly as well as his wound would let him, taking off his bloodstained garments rather ruefully; but no sooner had he blown out his candle than he knew that sleep was impossible. He began once more

counting over and over again the things that he remembered of Maddalena, telling the evening over from beginning to end, and it was in this way that he disinterred the memory of Massa's letter. Immediately, with the prepotence that the smallest difficulties assume over the most signal happiness in the small hours, the question of his relations with Massa became of an overwhelming importance, even obscuring his visions of Maddalena. Massa's letter had contained a direct request for information on the subject of the Farace family's dealings with the deputy Vaccari. Well, he had settled all that. He had no information to give. He had made a promise, and nothing could induce him to break it. But though this one point was settled beyond doubt, the larger issue of his future dealings with Massa had not been settled at all, and no love-blindness could excuse him from facing it. 'It is my duty to see how I stand before I go any further,' he said, and began methodically to review his relations with Massa from their very beginning.

It was no easy matter. It almost seemed to him as if Massa were aware of his position, as if, by some supernatural means, he were projecting his image into the troubled mind, so clearly was he haunted by the picture of that bare room in the tower of San Constanzo where the Dictator had last received him. 'To begin with,' he thought, 'I should not even be in Trinacria at the present moment if I had not come here to help Massa, partly, no doubt, because I've always been a victim to the charm of the man's personality, partly because the opinions for which he stands are those that I hold myself and am prepared to fight for. Even though many things that I've seen in Pergusa have shocked me, I can't honestly say that I've changed my politics.'

With the claims of friendship, of political sympathy, and what amounted to a promise of help, it seemed to him that he had exhausted the tale of his obligations to Massa, when it suddenly occurred to him that the very clothes which lay on the chair beside his bed had been supplied to him by the Dictator. 'But the money, thank God! is my own!' He paused in his logical progress to run his mind over the state of his finances.

In spite of the speculative exchange at which he had bought his paper money the expense of living in Pergusa had already swallowed more than two-thirds of it. 'And I shall want a new suit of clothes,' he reflected: 'not fancy dress this time!' At the outside the remains of his capital would last him a fortnight. 'And then,' he thought, 'I shall be dependent on Massa altogether unless I choose to starve!'

The prospect of this new obligation filled him with alarm, for he had begun to think of himself as within sight of freedom. He did not wish to be bound; for even if he still believed in Massa (a subject on which he had not yet committed himself) his belief in his job was suffering a steady disintegration under a variety of stresses.

From the very first he had been loath to accept the Communist Government's methods of violence; he had told Massa so, and for the time his scruples had been over-persuaded; but his resentment against the State's aggressions, rekindled by the bread-riots, had been fanned into flame by his indignation at the indiscriminate bombardment of the city, and, strangely enough, the thing that weighed with him more heavily than all the mass-suffering that he had seen was the story of Maddalena Farace's personal disaster as she had piteously related it. Who was her father? Why should he, Bryden, sympathise with this particular loss? That didn't matter. The only significant fact was that her tale had made him feel more deeply, and filled him with a definite distaste for the work he had undertaken.

The intrusion of Maddalena diverted his thoughts into another direction. 'Even if I did not love her—and I believe that for me she's the only woman in the world—pity would have compelled me to refuse to undertake any mission from Massa that implied a danger to her personally. It's true that I've refused to consider the matter as settled, but, as a matter of fact, I know that the promise of secrecy that I gave her in relation to her visiting Vaccari must be extended to embrace any political activity in which she is concerned. I can report nothing.' And that, precisely, was his job!

'But if that is so,' he argued with himself, 'my principles are worth nothing.' This he could not admit,

for it implied a softening of his moral fibre, and of this he was as sure as ever. Could it be possible, then, that he was changing? He did not think he had changed. And yet, when he looked at the matter squarely, he was bound to confess that the case of this struggling minority—he had rid his prejudices of the word 'reactionary'—made a vital appeal to his sympathy. The history of his war experience was repeating itself. Four hours before, moved by Maddalena's story, he would have been ready to take up arms against those who had shelled the city and killed the drunken woman who had hung on his arm as he crossed the square: in other words, against the government of Massa. 'But if once I admit this,' his conscience told him, 'I cannot go on living here under false pretences. I must let Massa know. In which case . . .'

The tale of consequences bewildered him. First of all, no doubt, he would lose his own life. Massa would regret the act of clemency, or weakness as he would call it, through which it had already been spared. A firing party and a brick wall was all that awaited him. Two months ago this would not have mattered greatly, for then he had not very much to live for. Now, on the other hand, he clung to life. Even if the ambition were hopeless, he was in love.

'And yet she wouldn't care if she lost me,' he reflected. 'If she were told that I was in love with her she'd be amazed, and possibly affronted. Again, if I told Massa of my change of politics and of interest he'd tumble pretty quickly to the source of my conversion. These people would pay for it, and Maddalena with them. Even if I take no active part in their work, and I've no reason to believe that I shall, at least I can devote myself to protecting the woman I love in the most dangerous period of her life.' And again he thought: 'There is no such thing as neutrality. *He that is not for us is against us.*'

Even so, every consideration of prudence advised him to wait, to temporise, to see how things developed. He was too wilful, too strong in his own conceit to listen to these persuasions. 'I'm not the waiting kind,' he said. 'I've always done the straight thing so far,

even when it's been uncomfortable, and if I don't do it now I shall never forgive myself. I must see Massa for myself, and if he can't realise that my doubts are honest, so much the worse for him!' This sounded very well, but in his heart Bryden knew that he should have said: 'So much the worse for *me*!'

Another argument mocked him. 'You, who so pride yourself on your openness, and say that you can't respect yourself unless you tell Massa what you feel, what are you doing in this *galère*? What have you been doing for the last two months? If you are so courageous, why haven't you told Maddalena Farace what you are?' 'I did, in effect,' he answered. 'I gave her Massa's letter.' 'Knowing that she wouldn't dare to open it?' 'Knowing nothing of the sort!' 'No, no, that will never do. You mustn't confess to any diminution of your belief in her fineness.' So he wearied himself with endless casuistry. '*How can Satan cast out Satan?*' he remembered bitterly. '*If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*'

And this consciousness of insecurity spurred him to such a state of determination that he lit his candle, carried it into the studio, and began a letter to Massa. Before he had finished the first page of it he knew that this proceeding, so indubitably right, was more than he could face. Evidently the reasons that dictated it, though he had arrived at them with care, were not valid.

'That is what love means,' he complained dolefully, well knowing that the circumstances of his defeat should have given him occasion for triumph. He threw the unfinished page of his report into the drawer in which its predecessors still rested; then returned to bed, and a little later, from sheer exhaustion, fell asleep.

2

Next morning he woke late, feeling as though he had not slept at all. During the last few weeks the sun, streaming at dawn through the louvres of his persian blinds, had stimulated and lightened him, inviting him

to enjoy the prospect of a brilliant day; but by this time Bryden was getting out of humour with eternal sunshine. It seemed to him ironical that the heavens should blaze with impartial zest upon the various, but uniformally bloody fortunes of the two parties in Pergusa. Once he had been able to laugh with it; but this bitter laughter he could not share. He felt a new and strange craving for the sympathy of northern skies that could smile or sadden or weep over human destinies. Any celestial mood, he reflected, would be better than this perpetual grin of sunshine with as much expression in it as an advertisement for metal-polish.

Even in the smaller details that his opened blinds revealed, the sun depressed him. It showed him that the suit of clothes which he had worn the night before was in a worse case even than he had imagined. The coat was done with for good and all. Maddalena, whose education in economy had come too late in life to be effective, had slit up the damaged sleeve without the least regard to its seams. He shook his head over it. The trousers, though stiff with the blood that had soaked into them, and therefore, at present, unwearable, might survive washing, though who should wash them he couldn't imagine. Luckily he had another pair that he had not worn since the night of his first encounter with Carlo. As far as he could see they only needed brushing. With these, and a clean shirt, he could at any rate appear decent. The anxiety to appear 'decent' was evidently occupying a large part of his mind. He realised the fact with a laugh at his own expense. 'I might be some damned subaltern just gazetted!' he thought. 'It's extraordinary how we males are cut to pattern in these affairs.'

By nine o'clock, an hour before the time fixed by Maddalena for his visit, he was ready, dressed, and as decent as he could make himself. A knock at the door brought his heart into his mouth. It was only Carolina, cringing before him with a cup of the decoction of roasted wheat which now served for coffee in Pergusa. He thanked her, thinking cynically: 'The old devil's only doing this because she thinks it may please the people

upstairs!' But no sooner had she gone than he felt that he might have done her an injustice: if ever a man had cause to be generous at the present minute, it must surely be himself—a random conclusion that showed the unreasonable state of his mind. 'In less than an hour,' he thought, 'I shall see her!'

He waited in his studio watching the minute hand of the clock creeping forward to the hour, surveying, with a new enthusiasm, his pictures. 'I shall be able to paint quite a lot with one hand,' he thought. Lucky it's the right! And I've never felt more like work all the time that I've been here.' With something of the same enthusiasm he had faced his work in the early days with Carmela, but this he did not remember.

Standing with his hand in his pocket before an unfinished canvas, his fingers became sensible of some unusual object and pulled out Carlo's signet ring that had lain there forgotten ever since the night when he had picked it up in the street. He whistled to himself. An awkward find! There was no reason, indeed, why he should not take it with him to the studio and hand it to Maddalena. Obviously it would be easier to do so now than it would have been twenty-four hours earlier. And yet he hesitated. The action would involve him in explaining how he had found, forgotten, and rediscovered it, and he had an uncomfortable feeling that if once he entered into explanations he would be treading dangerous ground from which it would be impossible to extricate himself without lying or exciting suspicion.

The sardonic smile of Carlo returned to him. No doubt that young man would think him capable of having kept the ring until he realised that he might curry favour by returning it. It irritated Bryden to find himself considering these mean matters of policy; but a more weighty consideration than any of his scruples was his present anxiety to stand well with Maddalena at all costs. The moral question involved was, after all, a small one, and the ring itself worth less than the trouble it might give him: modern, beyond doubt, a simple circle of gold with a crest engraved on the bossed signet.

A faint interest impelled him to wonder what the

crest might be. He held the ring up to the light and saw an eagle with a viper struggling in its talons surmounted by a marquesal coronet: the symbol upon which his eyes had gazed for so long on the porphyry tomb against which Maddalena had propped him. Cammarata . . . Maddalena Cammarata!

Once more the name awakened in his brain memories that were so dim that he despaired of catching them. Only he experienced a glow of satisfaction in having completed the name of Maddalena, and realised poignantly how much of her mind had been hidden from him the night before: the emotions with which she must have led him, unknowing, to the family chapel, the associations that must have crowded on her as she knelt before the altar of her ancestors. If he had known, what a rich intimacy he might have shared with her! 'And even now I know nothing . . . nothing!' He stood for a moment lost in contemplation of his own ignorance, and then, with an artless procrastination that was growing every hour more easy, locked up the ring in the drawer of Messiter's American bureau. 'Another piece of news for Massa!' he thought, with a laugh, 'though doubtless he knows it already.'

The clock struck ten.

3

Thus began a period of more positive happiness than Bryden had ever known before. If he lived in a fool's paradise it was paradise none the less. Every morning, at ten o'clock, he mounted the stairs to Maddalena's studio for his dressing, and often in the evening contrived to be sitting in the dank garden when she came to water her flowers, now more than ever parched by the unceasing drought. During all this time he submitted to a form of imprisonment, for the Faraces had decided in council that his presence in the streets with a wounded arm might attract the attention of the police to the house in which he lived. The idea seemed to him ridiculous considering the number of innocent people who had been caught up in the street fighting and

suffered more damage than himself, but Bryden would not quarrel with any circumstance that kept him near to Maddalena.

An arrangement was made by which Carolina undertook to supply him with the simple dishes that she cooked in her own kitchen; and this was fortunate, in view of the shortness of his funds. In any case Bryden would have gained little by leaving the palazzo; for when the first impulse of the counter-revolutionary movement had been smashed by the guns of the fleet, Massa, to make sure of its extinction, had marched thousands of his up-country levies into the city, men whose speech and civilisation were entirely different from those of the hybrid Pergusans, savages, as they thought them, shod in laced sandals of goat-skin and wrapped in the long white cloaks with the peaked hoods that the Saracens have bequeathed to them as a protection against excesses of sun and icy wind that blister the high plateaux.

In every street these rude, exotic figures, tall, and harsh of speech, were bivouacked beside the barricades that had arisen during the revolt, and under their occupation Pergusa became one vast jail split up into a hundred artificial compartments in which its inhabitants might starve, and grumble as much as they cared. It was useless to expect sympathy from these mountain dwellers, for Massa had told them that if the revolt in the city had succeeded it would have robbed them of the lands they had so lately won. In any case the purity of their race and their finer physique made them regard the Pergusans as a mean and bastard population : a definition that any rational being who was not a Pergusan himself would have accepted. Under the menace of this alien occupation the city lay cowed and quiet. No shot was heard in the streets at night; no conflagrations lit the sky; every circumstance contributed to the atmosphere of peace in which Bryden's passion for Maddalena was destined to develop.

His first impression of the studio beneath him as seen by daylight was one of incongruity. His own predecessor Messiter had been at any rate an artist, and

had left little that was offensive in his rooms but the traces of his literary taste. The apartment that the so-called Faraces occupied had been furnished in the ornate and pretentious vulgarity of Carolina's husband, the dealer in wines. Bryden found Maddalena, whom he remembered most clearly and most fittingly in the chaste setting of the Cammarata chapel, surrounded by a brutal and modern ugliness, of which, indeed, she seemed to be less conscious than he was himself. The combination of daylight with this incongruous background dissipated some of the picturesqueness with which Bryden had invested her. Among Carolina's furniture her mediævalism, the aspect of her which, to tell the truth, had first attracted him as being so remarkably in keeping with the Street of Palaces, disappeared, and in place of his old romantic ideal he discovered a new Maddalena who appealed less perhaps to his imagination, but to his heart a thousand times more.

In their new and entrancing relation he found, without the least pang of disappointment, that the moth-like vision of the garden and the inspired heroine of the barricades—conceptions both romantic and a little inhuman—were no more than two superficial aspects of the same tender and essentially human personality. The discovery thrilled him for it made her suddenly a woman, not only adorable but attainable.

Even his accepted version of her physical charms he now found to be wide of the mark. Her black dress and the thick veil or scarf that she habitually wore over her head had given him the impression that she was tall, very slim, and of a serious pallor. Pale indeed she was, but with an ivory paleness of health beneath which swift colour played. Now that he saw her daily in her simple morning dress he noted that though her build was slender she was neither thin nor yet very tall. Nor was her face habitually as serious as he had imagined. It was quick to humour, often vivacious, even if her eyes smiled more often than her lips. It seemed to him that those eyes were capable of more various expression than any he had ever seen; yet their expressions were unconscious, and even a little shy.

If Bryden had been mistaken in his picture of Maddalena he had been equally deceived in his estimate of the others. Carlo, he admitted, was something of a boor, the natural product of the kind of education that the son of a Trinacrian landowner receives. Bryden did not often see him, but as the young man's shyness wore off he began to greet the stranger with less reserve, and the fact that his handsome face, and particularly his eyes, gave sudden glimpses of Maddalena's, overcame Bryden's prejudices against him, as did also the fact that brother and sister were obviously united in a tender and charming intimacy. Indeed, it took him longer to get over the manners of Carlo's mother, which always seemed a little too good to be true. Her obvious anxiety to be nice to Bryden had only served to emphasise the fact that she regarded him as an inferior and something of a nuisance; but as time went on he realised that she, too, was a simple creature: that the elaborate politeness that she showed him was, after all, the mode of expression in which she had been educated, concealing a nature rather ordinary yet kind in essentials. At first he could not believe that the interest she showed in his wound was genuine—he felt then that she overdid it—but several spontaneous acts of kindliness, even these half-veiled by a formality of expression, convinced him that she was more human than he had imagined.

As for Maddalena, the night in the streets and the tense situation that had resolved itself in his adoration and her adorable humility, had forged between her and Bryden the bond that unites people who have endured dangers together and emerged from them with confidence in each other. They spoke little, and never once of that night's horrors or of the cloudy political future. By a deliberate effort of will which had, at first, been difficult, but now, in his lover's absorption, troubled him no longer, Bryden had succeeded in banishing the problem of his pact with Massa from his mind; his life had now no room for anything but Maddalena, and, as the days went by and their relations became more easy, he found it difficult to believe that she did not know it. Sometimes he was thrown back

on the perils of his own false position: as when she questioned him on the subject of his sojourn in the south of the island and the work that he was supposed to have done there. He fought his way out of this tangle as best he could, fearfully conscious of the direct scrutiny of her eyes, aided a little by the intimate knowledge of Magazzolo that he had learned in his uncle's office.

'Yes, there are many English merchants in Magazzolo,' she said. 'My father used to send his wines to their factories. I wonder you did not stay there: it would have been safer than Pergusa.'

He diverted her as best he could from the dangerous subject, fearing every moment that the well-known name of Bryden might throw him into confusion. He led her instead to talk of the colour of Pergusa and how its brilliant clarity had at first beggared the resources of his palette. Thus they drifted into a technical discussion, in which she showed intelligence and the diffidence of an amateur. With such talk he often managed to prolong the too-short moments that he spent in her company. At first the mother had always stayed in the studio during these interviews, but later, as though convinced against her will that Bryden was harmless, she often left them alone, retiring with Carlo to the room which overlooked the street and which Bryden had never entered.

Gradually, day by day, the length of these entrancing interviews was increased. It became clear to Bryden that she did not mind him staying a little longer than was necessary, that his conversation did not bore her; and yet he could never gauge how far he might presume on their growing intimacy, or how soon the absolute naturalness that she showed him might stiffen into formality and all his hopes be lost. Even though he now believed it to be false, his first estimate of her remoteness still threatened his happiness, and so he made sure that their conversation should never lead him into the danger of an emotional situation beyond his control, being content with the mere joy of her presence, drinking in the loveliness and grace whose memory sustained him during the hours between their

meetings. 'And yet,' he asked himself, 'can it be possible that she doesn't know that I adore her; and, knowing this, would she not avoid me if she resented it?' He only feared lest Maddalena, like her mother, were merely performing the obligations of her nobility toward a man who had suffered in her company and on her behalf; and this doubt could not be solved without achieving a more intense relation the results of which he dreaded.

One morning, being unwilling to leave her, he reminded her of her half-promise to show him some of her pictures. She smiled and blushed. 'My photographer's portraits, my drawing-room studies of life in Trinacria? No, no . . . I still have a little shame left!'

'No,' he said, 'I don't mean those. Some of the things you have done because you couldn't help doing them. I know you are an artist. Your fingers tell me so.' Then, seeing her shrink a little from the personality, he added hastily: 'Besides, from many things that you have told me, I know you have ideas.'

She hesitated. 'I have scarcely anything to show you,' she said, 'You can see the portraits in the shop windows. My photographer has a nice taste in frames. I assure you they cost him a good deal more than the pictures.'

'So you won't show me anything? It was a promise, you know.'

'In any case I don't think we have time this morning. I must be getting to work on my latest orders. I try to start punctually at eleven.' She looked at the clock and wavered. Then she produced a canvas from a heap that stood with their faces to the wall. 'This is something that you might like to see. It's a study from memory. I will fetch you one other, a portrait of my mother, and hide my blushes at the same time.' She placed the canvas against the back of a chair and left him.

Bryden found himself staring at the painting of a pillared pergola of vines, through which he gazed away, beyond the zone of chestnuts, to grilling limestone mountains. Beneath the pergola stood a seat embellished with a gay pattern of blue and yellow in Moorish tiles.

The foreground was a stone pavement on which the shadows of vine-clusters were etched with the clearness of absolute immobility. In a patch of sunshine between them a lizard lay basking. He rubbed his eyes. Surely he was dreaming, unless this were an actuality older than any dream. He was back again in the midst of the vision that had come to him on the fo'c'sle-head of the *Boston Hall*, conjured by the scent of the off-shore wind. A little detail shocked him: the pattern of the tiles on the stone seat. He knew it . . . he knew it! He gasped with the feeling of wonder that comes to a man when he discovers something that has been long hidden beneath the threshold of consciousness. The memory stabbed him, saying: 'You have been here before. When . . . when?' He would not be vexed with unanswerable questions. Enough for him was the ecstatic present. He resented this irruption of the past, for on this dream no other might intrude. Shaken and confused, he turned away from it to the picture on the easel that had stood there ever since the first moment when he had entered the room many nights before. 'A pastel,' he thought; for a debris of coloured chalk powdered the ledge of the easel, and the sketch, whatever it might be, was covered with a curtain of brown paper. Mechanically he detached the drawing pins that held it.

Another shock awaited him. As he lifted the cover he saw the pale, Teutonic features of the Duke of Riesi, grayer, indeed, than he had appeared in the royal group of Messiter's magazine, but the same anxious, puzzled, undistinguished face. But Bryden did not see them as they were. Before they had filled him with a melancholy and generous compassion, but the thought that the picture was executed by the hand of Maddalena left no room for these emotions. In a flash he remembered the anxiety with which she had covered this very picture, on his entrance with the unconscious Carlo. Why had she wanted to hide it? The real reason was obvious enough; but Bryden's passion supplied another. In a moment all his old misgivings swept back into his mind: his idea of Maddalena thrilled by a personal devotion to this petty royalty comparable to that of Flora Macdonald—a loyalty

that is wide enough to embrace love, one that stops at no sacrifice. And he had no doubt as to the form which the Duke's demands on her loyalty would take. While he had been dreaming in the room above, this elderly libertine had been sitting for his portrait, drinking in the admiration of Maddalena, appraising her beauties with his coldly sensual eyes, considering the possibilities of possessing her. A pleasant occupation for a man at leisure, lazily flattered by the flutterings of his victim! Bryden clutched at the idea of Maddalena's personal pride. 'But there's not one of them,' he thought, 'who wouldn't be proud to be the mistress of that fellow!' Anger and hopeless jealousy were mingled in Bryden's mind. He was consumed by hatred of a man whom he had never seen; yet nothing, in that moment, could have convinced him of his want of reason. As he stood there, with the blood beating in his temples, Maddalena entered.

'What are you doing?' she cried, 'What are you doing?'

The excitement in her voice assured him that he had judged rightly. Of course he was right! Her blazing cheeks, her eyes, confirmed him. He gazed at her, speechless, and she passed swiftly between him and the picture as though she wanted to cover it, to protect it from his eyes. This attitude exasperated him more than ever.

'You needn't cover it,' he said harshly. 'I don't suppose you are ashamed of it.'

She controlled her agitation. 'Of course I'm not,' she said. 'You've stolen a march on me. I've brought you the other. That is unfinished.'

He took no heed of her. 'It's a striking face,' he said. 'Why do you cover it? Tell me the name of your sitter.'

'That couldn't interest you. It is a friend of our family.'

'An intimate friend?'

'Yes. One to whom we owe a great deal.'

'It must have taken many sittings. There's one point on which I think I can help you . . . the forehead . . . .' He moved toward the easel as though he

would move the cover from it again. She stopped him.

'Don't . . . please!' she said.

'You're very intense about it! Is the portrait of a middle-aged gentleman so sacred?' He watched the emotions that played over her face with an increasing bitterness. 'Now she'll begin to lie to me,' he thought. 'If she lies to me I shall know that I'm right.' 'Let me look,' he said, and since she no longer tried to prevent him he tore the cover from the picture, revealing the mocking, self-satisfied gaze of the portrait's eyes. Maddalena controlled herself with difficulty.

'Why do you do that?' she asked.

'I want to examine the object of your devotions more closely.'

'Devotions?'

'Tell me who it is?'

'You're behaving like a madman. Why should I?'

'You needn't. We'll deduce it. It isn't a member of your family: that's clear enough. It *is* a member of your household. That also is clear. I know what visitors you have.' She gave a gasp, but he did not realise the mistake he had made and continued: 'Obviously, of course, it is some one to whom you are deeply attached. And that interests me.'

'What do you mean?'

'Can't you see?'

She restrained herself with difficulty. When Bryden had told her that he knew who were her visitors, all the old suspicions which his frankness had compelled her to abandon returned. She was thinking desperately of all the things that she had been foolish enough to reveal to him. The thought stunned her, humiliated her.

'Don't play with me like this,' she said. 'Don't torment me!'

'I won't,' he returned bitterly. 'I'll tell you the extent of my conclusions. You're sheltering in this house the man whose leisure you've flattered with this pretty performance. You'd better tell me who it is.'

She trembled. 'What right have you to ask?'

As she spoke he watched a growing terror in her face. Then he saw her master her emotion. All of the woman

that he had discerned in it seemed to vanish; it became once more that of the cold, determined spirit which he had first encountered, daring, hard, incapable of love. 'It's as I thought,' he told himself.' She's bewitched, infatuated!' He hardened himself toward her. He would break her spirit.

'Tell me,' he said. 'You'd better tell me. Perhaps I know already. . . .'

Her old cry rose to her lips: 'You're threatening me!' But this time her eyes were bright, not with anger but with tears, as though she were hurt by the defection of some one in whom she had trusted. So Bryden read it, and the hope softened his heart. He lost all sense of his surroundings, only hearing her words. 'You're threatening me!' Then his heart spoke for him:

'God, no!' he cried. 'I love you.'

He took her hand, kissing it clumsily. She made no response; did not even withdraw it from him; but he knew he could do no more. He stood before her, shaken, entreating her forgiveness for his rude jealousy, and glad to do so since it enabled him also to tell her of his love. She listened as passively as if his words did not reach her. Still clasping her hand he stammered out his tale. Threatening? How should he threaten a woman for whose least wish he would sacrifice his life. He had spoken brutally, unpardonably: and yet she must pardon him if she knew how desperately he adored her! Could there be any love without cruelty? He didn't know . . . But this he could tell her: that from the first glance he had known the subject of her portrait to be the Duke of Riesi. It was the thought that another man . . . any man . . . but most of all one to whom he knew she was bound by ties of sentiment . . . was near her, that had made him lose his reason. He had wronged her, deeply, but how much more deeply he loved her! And now he could do nothing but plead for forgiveness. 'Though even if you do not pardon me,' he added, 'you can't stop me loving you. Whatever you do I must worship you who are so wonderful, so beautiful. . . .'

And she stood sadly above him, her eyes still full of tears, doubting, struggling with her doubts, trying to

believe him. He took her silence for a sign of his defeat, knowing that even if the harm were irrevocable he must have spoken, and that he could not persuade her more. He waited, but still she would not speak.

'Can you say nothing?' he whispered at last.

'Not now.'

He pressed her. 'This evening in the garden?'

'Perhaps.'

'At sunset?'

'Yes.'

The silence was broken by a tap at the door, which startled them both. She withdrew her hand, as if she had suddenly become conscious that it still lay in his.

'It's my model,' she said. 'You must go.'

He obeyed her, following to the door. She opened it, and as he left her a woman who was standing there drew aside to let him pass: a young woman of the working-classes with a black shawl drawn about her head. He did not even glance at her: for him there was only one woman in the world: but as he hurried past her she gave an exclamation of surprise. He turned for an instant, and saw that it was Carmela; but before he could reach her the door had closed behind her.

4

Staggered by this encounter Bryden retreated to his studio. Carmela had taken the wind out of his sails; he hung helpless, inert, feeling that the desperate currents that had his fortunes in their power must now sweep him where they would. If the old love's intervention had not been timed so nicely, confounding him in the supreme moment of his declaration to the new, fate would have seemed to him less unkind. It was no use reminding himself that his intuitions had warned him of this danger: the fact that he had been forewarned didn't lessen the desperation of his case. He must act, and act quickly; but for the time his reason would not work, and he swung helpless, tortured by the thought of what might now be happening in the room beneath where the two women sat talking together. For Carmela

—how well he knew her!—was anything but discreet. If he could stop her! But to stop her would be to betray himself. He must wait, trusting to luck. It was about time that this goddess did him a good turn for a change!

He could picture the whole scene so easily. Carmela, babbling on like a child, letting fall careless words that would beat like concentrated gunfire on the foundations of faith; which he had built so carefully in Maddalena's mind, pounding them into dust: and Maddalena, listening, pretending to paint, poor soul! miserably waiting to hear the last—for by this time he believed that she would be sorry to lose him and even more humiliated by the thought of what she had given already.

It was just possible, he thought, that Carmela would spare her companion the tale of her own relations with Bryden—not because she was modest about them but because, with another woman, she might be secretive about things that mattered; but his name, his history, his political tendencies, even his friendship with Massa must surely by now have been revealed. These things, by themselves, were enough to make his mission impossible, and this would have been a relief to him if it had not also implied the end of his connection with Maddalena, in comparison with which nothing else mattered at all. The uncertainty! He wished to God it were more uncertain! If only there had been time to speak one word of warning to Carmela, the whole tragedy might have been averted. Without such a warning he was sure he could count on a complete and artless betrayal. And it was his own damned fault! From the first moment in which he imagined he heard her voice he should not have rested until he had found her and somehow closed her mouth. It was no good blaming his luck nor even regretting his carelessness. By this time, in all probability the damage was done. This was the end.

Yet, even though he dared not hope, Bryden was anxious to know his fate. From time to time he lingered, listening at his door for the least whisper or movement in the room below. At all costs he must catch Carmela on her way home and hear the worst from her. An

hour passed, and yet another, without a sound. They were very quiet down there. Of course the story was a long one, and Carmela never had been known to keep to the point. He could see Maddalena tortured by her innocent digressions. Suddenly he heard the door on the landing open. She was coming. He strained his ears to catch their farewells, hoping to judge by the tone of them what had happened. The two women stood talking on the threshold. He heard voices low and eager, and then a laugh from Maddalena. The sound gave him hope. Would she have laughed if Carmela had told her? He couldn't believe it, unless, indeed, it were a forced expression of her wounded pride. It didn't sound like that. It sounded just like the laugh that had enchanted him in the garden on the night of their first meeting: happy, natural. Heavens! how he loved her!

The door closed. Carmela's steps passed slowly along the corridor away from him. If he were quick he might intercept her, not at the foot of the stairs—that would be too dangerous—but by slipping out of Carolina's door into the side street.

The precautions that he had taken against being seen abroad with his wounded arm were quite forgotten. He pulled on a hat and ran downstairs, luckily meeting no one and reaching the corner of the alley at the moment when Carmela, who was leisurely in all her movements, was leaving the front of the palazzo. She turned down the pavement in his direction. He waited, and, as she approached, appeared before her. Her lips broke into a smile, the lazy contented smile that he knew so well. She took his hand, then put up her face to him. Mechanically he kissed her cheek.

'At last!' she said, 'I knew it wouldn't be long before we met.'

'Let us move on,' he said hurriedly. She obeyed him. He did not know where he was taking her.

'You knew I was in Pergusa?' he asked anxiously.

'Not till I saw you this morning. But I knew, my dear, that you would come. I was only waiting. Now, at last I am happy.'

The devil she was! He walked rapidly; he wanted to

put a distance between them and Maddalena. The memory of Carmela's warm cheek on his lips frightened him.

'Where are you going, so fast?' she said. 'It's useless to go along here. There's a barricade at the end of the street.'

'Is there?' He took a haphazard turning to the right and somehow felt safer. 'I want to talk to you,' he said.

She laughed. 'Naturally, after so many years. How many?' She counted on her fingers. 'Six. How time flies!' She accompanied the platitude with a little affectionate pressure on his arm: a movement that he knew so well. Instinctively he quickened his pace.

'Robert, you are just the same,' she laughed softly. 'Walking me off my feet as usual. Tell me where you are taking me.'

'I haven't a ghost of an idea. I tell you we must talk. I've a lot to say to you.'

'If you run like this,' she said, 'you'll have no breath left to say it. In the sun, too! When I, if you please, am dying of hunger.'

'I'm sorry' he said. 'We can eat and talk at the same time. Where shall we go?'

She rose to the idea with delight. 'Yes, it shall be our *festa*. I know a place quiet and simple like Rufo's. What shall we eat, Robert?' The question inspired her. 'First we will have *calamaio* fried in thin strips like matches. That is my latest passion. I could eat it night and day. Yes, positively, I could take a plate to bed with me and eat it cold in the night. I don't think you ever appreciated good things. And then . . . then I think the *padrone* has probably a little *pasta* hidden somewhere . . . that is if you can pay for it. And wine. We will have a bottle of sparkling wine for our *festa*. I know you don't like it. It's too sweet for you, my love. But just for my sake? Oh, what a feast!' It was amazing; apparently she meant to pick him up as she had done before and put him in her pocket—just as if nothing had ever happened between them.

She would not let him speak for her prattle. 'And it's so nice to talk to you,' she said. 'These Pergusans

don't know how to treat a woman. The dirty blackguards I've had at me! I could tell you something!' She was silent for a moment and then broke out gaily: 'Robert, do you remember the rolls of white bread, crisp from the oven, we used to buy in the King's Road? How it used to crackle in your teeth! Think of that compared with the sour black stuff that you get here . . . when you *can* get it. And our little table at Rufo's, Robert? Do you remember that monkey of a waiter? He used to cheat old Rufo, that chap. I'm sure of it. Us sitting there, and that sly devil Massa thinking out his plans over by the cash-desk. I never could bear that man, somehow. Why, here we are in no time!'

She led him into a small eating-house. The proprietor joked with her as though she were a good customer. They called each other by their Christian names, and when she coaxed him to produce some of his hidden store of *pasta* she said 'darling.' Bryden was too preoccupied to be revolted by all this. She introduced him. 'This is Roberto,' she said.

'A cousin?' said the proprietor with a laugh.

'Brazen face! No, he's my own man, and don't make any mistake. Give us the wine first, Domenico.'

She arranged her hair in front of a mirror painted with a pattern of emerald foliage and gaudy flowers. Bryden saw that it had lost none of its old luxuriance. Indeed, she was more beautiful than ever, for the poor food of Pergusa had made her slimmer and taken a little of the colour out of her cheeks. She knew that he was watching her, so she turned and smiled. 'Now what do you think of your little Carmela?' she said. 'Have I grown ugly?' He hesitated. She covered his confusion by coming to him, and then increased it by putting her hands on his shoulders and kissing him. He was poignantly conscious of a scent that he remembered well. 'Robert,' she whispered, 'must I teach you all over again?'

He could stand no more of this, and yet he knew that it would be fatal to offend her at the start unless he wanted to lunch with a fury.

'Carmela, you must be serious,' he said. 'There are one or two things you must tell me.'

'Is this the confessional?' she asked, 'And will you promise me absolution?'

He humoured her. 'Tell me first,' he said, 'what you were doing in the Palazzo Leonforte.'

'I go there three times a week to sit. She can't pay me much. Don't you find her *simpatica*? I do. But I prefer men . . . Englishmen, that is.'

'And you had never seen me there before this morning?'

'Do you think, my dear, I should have avoided you if I had?'

'Did you speak to her . . . to Signorina Farace about me this morning? The truth now!' He hung on her words.

'Of course I didn't,' she smiled. 'What is it to do with her?'

'Not even my name?'

'I've told you. Don't you understand Trinacrian?'

'She didn't ask you if you knew me?'

'Why should she?'

'She must have heard your exclamation at the door.'

'Of course she did. You made me jump out of my skin. She thought I was frightened; told me that you were a neighbour and that you'd been damaged in the fighting She said she was sorry you'd made me jump.'

'And what did you say?'

'I laughed. I thought: "That's all *you* know about him!" I told her that *I* wasn't afraid of men. No more I am! Ah, here's the *calamaio*. I hope he's fried it crisply. How I adore it!'

Her appetite was as good as ever. She was so intent on questions relating to her food that for some time Bryden could get nothing out of her. He devoured his meal sullenly, and she rallied him on his slowness. 'Your education has been neglected for . . . how many years did I say?—yes, six. I shall have to begin all over again. What a nuisance you are!' Her cheeks had become flushed and her eyes bright with the wine. She became more than ever demonstrative, and Bryden found it increasingly difficult to keep her to the point 'Oh, don't bother me with any more of your questions now!' she said. 'Haven't we whole years in front of us?'

He had to curb his impatience. Even when she had finished her meal with a sigh of content, calling for coffee and begging Bryden for a cigarette, she would not listen to him. 'Come over and sit by me, then,' she said. 'I can't talk to you a mile away.' He came over to her side and she settled up against him with a sly kiss. 'Do you think Domenico saw me? Ah, your poor arm! I've hurt it. How did it happen? Tell me. Why should you ask all the questions and tell me nothing?'

He told her that he had been hit crossing the square on the night of the naval bombardment. 'Careless one,' she said. 'How careless! If you'd been with me I shouldn't have let you out. You should do as I do. As soon as any firing starts I get straight into bed . . . with my clothes on, of course. It would be a fine thing if one had to turn out of a burning house in a chemise! But your arm? Is it nearly well? Let me look at it. I don't believe there's much the matter with it. It's your pretty neighbour that you're after. I know that quiet kind!'

Bryden flushed with anger. He could not bear to hear her speak of Maddalena. 'Don't talk like that,' he said quickly. She looked at him in astonishment, then laughed. 'There now! I didn't mean it,' she said.

And still he found it impossible to tie her down to the subject of his fears, partly because of her childish inconsequence, and partly because he felt that the proprietor of the restaurant was taking an unhealthy interest in his wounded arm and was probably preparing to denounce him to the police. 'We can't talk here,' he said, rising abruptly.

'You're in a great hurry,' she said, with a lazy puff of smoke. 'Still, if you prefer it, we'll go.'

He paid the bill and they left the restaurant. 'This is the way,' she said. 'It's not five minutes.'

'Five minutes? Where to?'

'Why, to my room, of course. We can't walk the streets all afternoon. In this climate every sensible person takes a rest after lunch. And there we can talk quietly for as long as you like.'

He assented, and she guided him into a deep gutter of an alley divided by a band of shadow into two strips: one dark, one white with blinding sunlight. They entered a shabby block of buildings and climbed three flights of stairs. Then she led him into a small room, dim with the light of closed Persian blinds. One of these she opened, telling Bryden to rest himself on the bed while she took off her things. She began to hum one of her old tunes, and the sound threw Bryden back into the atmosphere of their Chelsea studio, as if by magic.

It was indeed astounding how Carmela had imposed the stamp of her personality on a room that was little different from any other lodging in the poorer quarters of Pergusa. It was littered, as might be expected in such a cramped space, with various articles of clothing which might have belonged to any one and yet were surely, definitely hers. By the bedside, in its old position, hung one of the coloured pictures of San Constanzo, to which she was so attached. It seemed to him that she had managed to replace the one she had left in Chelsea exactly. On the table at her bedside stood a photograph in a tarnished silver frame. He saw, with emotion, that it was a pathetically bad representation of himself as he had been before the war. He turned away from it. Then he caught sight of his own face reflected in a cheap mirror; and, as he did so, he realised that the man whose photograph was standing at the bedside was dead, though whether he had left his soul in Flanders, in Colchester Jail, or in the streets of Pergusa, he could not tell. That was the man who had loved Carmela, the creature whose image she still preserved. He felt suddenly sorry for her ignorance. She didn't know, poor thing, that this other man was dead and that she had a stranger in her room.

She went on humming softly to herself, moving about the room, with her own quiet purpose, just as he had watched her do so many times before. For she, as he could see, had not changed at all. She was just happily picking up the threads that war had severed so violently six years before, reclaiming without hesitation what she took to be her own; and Bryden was overcome with a pity for her in which no vestige of love survived. Apart

from that one fierce quarrel in which she had left him they had never known a serious disagreement, for her temperament was naturally placid and she had asked him for little beyond the simplest physical comforts. He knew that he owed her much, far more than he could ever repay, and this too troubled him. The story of her adventure with the Pole in Paris supplied him with an excuse for shirking this obligation, but he couldn't accept it. He could not even say it the tale were true, and, for that matter, could accuse himself of a few casual adventures with women to balance it. The symbol that distressed him most deeply was the pathetic presence of his dead self's photograph at her bedside. 'This is a devil of a hole!' he thought.

Carmela's voice broke in on his reflections. She had taken off her dark dress and was standing in her underclothes with bare arms and neck. 'If I'd known this was coming,' she said, 'I should have changed these. Well, well, you must take me as I am. It's too strange to believe, and yet it seems so natural. It might only have been yesterday that I went running along the King's Road without my hat. How mad I was!' She laughed, then bent above him, warm and breathing. She took his head in her hands as she was always wont to do and kissed his lips. 'Robert, I love you,' she whispered. 'Isn't it marvellous? To be near you again. . . .'

With a sigh of content she lay down beside him, putting her arm across his breast, pressing her forehead against his cheek. 'Your face is cold,' she said. She gave him a long, inquiring look, surprised at his passivity. 'I can see you are tired,' she said. 'And I'm sleepy too. It's the fault of the wine and the south wind. Yes, you shall sleep.' She yawned luxuriously. 'So quiet too. Now we shall be happy at last. What a long time!'

She closed her eyes and lay, breathing softly, up against him so that he knew as of old the warmth of her body. 'When we wake,' she sighed sleepily,' we must make all kinds of plans.' Her finger-tips began to play with his right ear, following the convolutions in and out. He knew that trick so well! How strangely different was this from the touch of Maddalena's fingers on his wounded arm! And in a little while he knew

by her soft and regular breathing that she had fallen asleep.

But sleep was far from Bryden. The incredible falseness of his position weighed on him, and he did not see how he could extricate himself from beneath it. He lay staring at the ceiling. Why should he extricate himself at all? Why not throw up the sponge, admit his failure, leave the palazzo and join this woman who, after her fashion, loved him beyond doubt, and had still the power, as he realised lying there beside her, of moving his senses? That way was obvious and easy. But he knew that it couldn't be done. He was in love with Maddalena. He flattered himself that his new love was of a different kind from the old. And that was natural enough. He had only to compare Maddalena with the woman at his side to appreciate her subtler beauty, her fineness of body and mind. He knew that a hopeless love for Maddalena would give his spirit more than the fullest possession of Carmela: for he could never possess more than Carmela's body, and what he told himself he wanted was Maddalena's soul. 'Cant,' he said to himself, 'rotten cant! I'm thinking like a parson! Soul be damned!' And yet he could not find better words. An unaccountable passion! For what, in the sum, did he know of Maddalena? Next to nothing. From her mystery, perhaps, was nourished the intensity of his desire. Perhaps, at the root of it, his self-esteem had lately suffered so many shocks that he wasn't going to run the risk of another. 'I love her, and there's an end to it,' he said.

Unfortunately, it was only the beginning, and reason, that unwelcome counsellor of lovers, assured him that the very existence of his love for Maddalena was threatened by Carmela's knowledge of his past and the fact that with her typical abandon she seemed to take a renewal of their old relation for granted. Somehow or other her mouth must be closed, and the obvious way to close it was with kisses—nor yet half-heartedly, for in matters of passion she was skilled to detect the finest shades of feeling. She was not, emphatically, a woman whom he could easily deceive, and experience had proved that he was a bad hand at deceiving any one.

'If it were only possible to convince her that my feelings were unchanged and at the same time. . . .' He knew there was only one way of convincing her, and that would not do. How could he, being so diminished in his own eyes, appeal for the love of Maddalena? Impossible! Somewhere in this tangle there must be room for a compromise . . . but whatever the compromise might be, time was pressing and some decision must be made. He could not look at his watch without waking Carmela, and at sunset, if he had read her eyes rightly, Maddalena would be waiting for him in the garden.

So he lay on, until the light showed more feebly through the blinds and the air grew cooler. Surely the sun was setting. Carmela awoke and rubbed her eyes. She turned her head and kissed him with the warmth of sleep in her lips. He did not dare to return her kisses. If once he did so he felt that he could not trust himself and all would be over. The thought humiliated him. Was he so weak as that? Already she had been quick to realise his restraint.

'Robert,' she said. 'What is the matter with you? Tell me. Am I displeasing to you? Do you not want me?'

He put her off with a half caress. 'My arm is paining me,' he said, 'and my head is too full of other things.'

'What other things?' she asked quickly, scornfully.

He sought a temporary refuge in mystery. 'I haven't told you,' he said, 'what I am doing in Pergusa. That was what I wanted to talk to you about. Realise that this is serious. I'm afraid I'm late already. At sunset I promised to return to the palazzo. After that we will soon meet again and then I will tell you everything.'

She took no notice of all this. 'What other things?' she repeated dully. She raised herself on the bed, leaned over him and looked into his eyes, seeking the truth.

'Then you will come back here to-night . . . not to leave me?'

'Perhaps,' he lied.

'Perhaps? Is it *perhaps*?: she cried. 'Ah, you needn't tell me any more. I know. It's your pretty neighbour that you're after, that pale, thin scarecrow!

What's wrong with me? Have I grown ugly? No, you're like the rest of them: you take the best of us and then you're off after something else. And if that's so . . . if that's so, I know what to do with her. I can spoil her so that you'll be glad to run away from her face!' Then she quietened down and took him in her arms, clinging to him, pleading like a child: 'Robert, stay with me, stay with me!'

He laughed, but in that moment the temptation to do so was nearly intolerable. He put his arm about her and began to talk to her seriously. 'It means that I shall have to let you into my secrets,' he said, for there's no other way of convincing you.'

'Secrets? I know your secret already. You're in love with her. You're going back to her. I've told you what I'll do. . . .'

'Listen, Carmela. This is the truth. I came to Trinacria not to find you or any other woman. You know that Massa was my friend in London. . . .'

'Yes.'

'Well, I came here to help him.'

'The dirty devil! I could never bear that man.'

'At the present moment I'm employed by him on a matter of secret service. I live in the Palazzo Leonforte because it is my business to report on the people in it. I am doing my best to become intimate with the daughter, not because I want to but because it's my business. As far as I'm concerned you can do any mad thing that your silly jealousy suggests so long as you don't interfere with my work. Do you understand now?'

She stared at him, still incredulous, then, slowly realising the material aspects of the business, inquired: 'And does Massa pay you well?'

'I have what money I want.'

'And that is what you're living on?'

'Yes.'

'Well,' she said, 'a man must live, and it's no business of any one to interfere with his living. But that doesn't make me hate her any the less. The sly cat! Never again will I set foot in that house.'

'I'm delighted to hear it. What I wanted to impress

on you was that the least word from you about my life in London, and my acquaintance with Massa, would put me in the cart. These aristocrats are timid—the poor devils have need to be—and if once they're frightened, my job's finished and I shall find myself without a penny. That isn't all: if things went wrong Massa would have me shot as soon as look at me. So, for God's sake, be patient.'

Again she said: 'I don't want to interfere with any man's work.' It was evidently one of the main tenets of her primitive creed.

'That's a sensible girl,' he said, 'and I hope it's clear to you that if you don't want to ruin me you'll never let any of the Farace family know that you're acquainted with me.'

'I shall never set foot in the damned place again. I've told you that,' she replied energetically. 'I hate the very sight of her now.'

The matter could not have resolved itself better.

'And now, my child, I must go,' he said. 'It's important that I should be there at sunset, and I'm afraid I'm late already.'

'Very well,' she said. 'You shall go. But you will come back to-night?'

'I've told you I can't promise.'

'It doesn't matter how late it is. You know how lightly I sleep. I think I should hear your step on the stairs even. Promise me that you won't be too long?'

'For to-night I can't promise. Be reasonable!'

'I don't know now if I believe you . . .' She hesitated. 'Well, then, to-morrow for certain? You shan't put me off again. To-morrow! We will eat at Domenico's at half-past seven. You promise?'

There was nothing else left for him to do. He promised. He kissed her, and still she clung to him as though she felt he were going away for ever. He loosened her arms from his neck.

'Robert . . . if you've deceived me . . .' she whispered.

He went away, ashamed and pitying her simplicity. Already the streets were lost in pitchy darkness. How late it was he could not imagine.

The Eighth Chapter

MADDALENA

I

THE afternoon that Bryden had spent so restlessly in Carmela's room had not been one of rest for Maddalena. Her relation with Bryden had always been puzzling, and even a little disturbing. At first, with more reason than she imagined, she had feared him. It was alarming in itself that any stranger should have penetrated the obscurity of the Palazzo Leonforte, now made holy in the eyes of all believers by the presence of the legitimate King of Trinacria, the proscribed Duke. Indeed, Bryden could never have imagined the consternation that Carolina's triumphant report of a new lodger paying an exorbitant rent produced among the Cammarata family who, in the depth of their own misfortune, had accepted the additional risk of that distinguished presence. Never for one moment, if they had known, would they have admitted Bryden to the palazzo; he would undoubtedly have been shown the door had not Carolina's love of gain, her poverty, and the skill with which Massa had shuffled and Bryden had played the cards, forced them to accept the *fait accompli* with which the old woman in her ignorance presented them . . . for not even she had been trusted to know the identity of their visitor.

So, beneath the appearance of aristocratic unconcern with which they had irritated Bryden, his victims had been much more active in their curiosity than he imagined. All through the period when Bryden had been clumsily casting about in search of Carlo Cammarata, Carlo himself had been pursuing his favourite pleasures and scrutinising Bryden for himself on the terrace of the Café Greco. Luckily for Bryden, his loneliness, together with the fact that he was a foreigner

and the subject of a friendly power, had allayed the suspicions or at any rate stayed the panic into which his arrival had thrown his neighbours. Carlo's reports were all in his favour, and the correctness and friendliness of his behaviour on the night when the watcher had been thrown into his victim's arms had further established his innocence.

Yet, even in spite of these reassurances, Maddalena had still considered him a person to be avoided, until the night of terror on which he had shown her his courage, his humanity, and, as she thought, his aggrieved honesty. His chivalry she accepted as her due, and even after the intimacies of that night she had not troubled her mind with any thoughts of love. This may seem strange; for her age, her beauty, and the romantic circumstances of their meeting should have been sufficient to suggest them —the more so in that Bryden was a handsome fellow of a type which, as his father had already shown, was likely to appeal to a Trinacrian woman by its very opposition to her own; yet no such thought had entered Maddalena's mind, partly, perhaps, because, as the daughter of an impoverished Trinacrian nobleman she had been taught not to look for romance outside the limits of her class, and even more because the idea of vengeance—*vendetta*—which she had confessed to him in the Cammarata chapel possessed it. This primitive passion, to her lover's easy English temperament an unimaginable thing, was no more than a natural legacy of the feudal civilisation which she represented, and so absorbed her as to make her for the present incapable of any interest that did not subserve it. Such an objection could not be urged against her devotion to their fugitive, the Duke of Riesi, which Bryden's jealousy had suspected rightly but wrongly interpreted, for the triumph of the royalist cause implied the defeat of the forces against which her feelings of vengeance were directed.

In this state matters had remained until the fact of Bryden's wound had opened to him the doors of the Cammarata's apartment; but the quiet and wholly delightful intimacy that arose from their new relation had changed them, though, even then, Maddalena would

not have confessed to any unusual tenderness for her patient. The fact remained that she was young and healthy and ripe for love; that never in her life had she known the intimate society of any man but her father and Carlo—the Duke was an article of faith rather than a human being—and that Bryden, by his physical presence, his strength, his gentleness, and above all by the communicable intensity of his unspoken passion was gradually compelling her to accept him if not as a lover as a friend. Insidiously his presence told on her, so much that even when he had left her, her thoughts would follow him to the loneliness of his studio with speculations as to his comfort, with pity and with concern.

The fact that he was a painter intrigued her, for her own painting was a very real interest, and if she had dared to do so she would have asked to see his work, while she was secretly anxious for his judgment on her own. For every ill of her loneliness Bryden's friendship supplied a palliative, and, though her pride would not admit it, she began to look forward eagerly to each moment of his presence. Little by little her life demanded more of him and her thoughts began to dwell upon features of his personal appearance, his strong but sensitive hands, his eyes, that met hers so often, the deep tones of his voice. Things that she had taken for granted she now began to consider in detail and with a pleasure unconfessed. If she had been given to self-analysis she might have seen the direction in which her mind was tending, but its clear Latin nature discouraged introspection. In the lives of such women love enters suddenly, royally, unquestioned, and there is an end of it!

So it was that Bryden's declaration came to her unexpected and yet without surprise. At any other time she might have accepted it as freely as Bianca Leonforte had accepted that of Bryden's father; but she knew that this tormented season was no time for love, and that though the thought of it might sustain and inspire her in the work she had undertaken, the salvation of her class and of her country, any passion that might weaken this devotion was unworthy of the heights to which she had elevated her ideal of love.

Therefore she had refused him an immediate answer to his appeal, strenuously compelling herself to enforce the continuity of her daily life.

So she had stood pale and, as it seemed, composed when Bryden left her and Carmela entered the studio, and covered the fluttering of her heart with a humorous concern for the shock that her patient had given to her model, setting herself to the task of completing the picture of a lush Trinacrian beauty that her dealer had commissioned and that would keep the family and their refugee in the necessaries of life for a week or more.

She began to paint, while Carmela lighted her cigarette and posed as languidly as she had ever done for the amorous academician. They spoke little, for when she was working Maddalena expected to hear nothing from her model but the political rumours of the alleys, and, since this was a dangerous subject, no great intimacy had ever arisen between them; but all the time she was thinking of Bryden with a sweet and tremulous exultation, little knowing that the thoughts of the woman who faced her, lazily lighting cigarette after cigarette, apparently absorbed in an idle placidity, were inwardly burning with a different flame that the same face had kindled.

She went on working for an hour and more scarcely knowing what she did; her brush moved as though it were controlled by some alien intelligence and the picture grew before her eyes miraculously. 'What would he think of this mechanical stuff?' she said to herself, and she began to wonder if Bryden were really a painter, for it would be wonderful to her if the man who loved her and whom she knew already to be full of manly virtues were also one of the great ones of the earth: a natural thought, for in Trinacria, a country scattered with the remnants of ancient perfection, the creative artist is still respected as the flower of human civilisation. 'But if he were no better painter than myself,' she thought, 'it would not matter. All that matters is that he loves me.' And the unspoken word deliciously thrilled her. Love was so new to her.

Examining Carmela, she began to wonder if this woman too had a lover. 'Probably many lovers,' she thought

'but how different . . . how different from mine!' And, in the generosity of the moment, she began to wish that Carmela might be happy in her love, to wonder if this creature of her own sex could ever know the curious rapture that filled her own heart to overflowing. 'But no love could ever be as strange as this!' She smiled for the joy of her own thoughts, and Carmela, seeing her smile, smiled back at her.

She became conscious of the other woman as a tired model. 'I won't keep you much longer,' she said. 'The picture is nearly finished. Another sitting will be enough. The people at the shop are in a hurry. You'll be certain to come the day after to-morrow at the same time?' She paid Carmela her fee and showed her to the door. 'Next time,' she said with a laugh—the laugh that came to Bryden's anxious ears—'next time I shan't have any strangers to frighten you on the doorstep!'

For some strange reason it pleased her to refer to Bryden even thus indirectly; and this was not the only way in which her desire to share her new excitement showed itself, for more than once during the afternoon, with Carlo, with her mother, even with Carolina, she felt an impulse to tell them what had happened. Not by a formal confession of Bryden's avowal or her own glowing response: that, she knew, would be out of the question and utterly out of harmony with their circumstances. It shocked her to think that this ecstasy of hers might be considered a light and dangerous thing by those who were nearest to her, and the certainty of their disapproval, to put it at the mildest, set her thinking as to how she might reconcile a passion which would not suffer denial with the devotion that had hitherto absorbed, and, if she were to be worthy of herself, must continue to absorb a great part of her life. 'Love,' she told herself 'has always been made nobler by abnegation.' And she pleased herself by contemplating examples of great denials that came to her not from the magnificent loves of history but from the lives of the saints, which she had learned as a child.

By these reflections she convinced herself easily enough, pitting the mediævalism of her nature against its frank

and passionate directness; but even though she felt that she could answer for herself and could undertake, for the time being, to subordinate her emotions to the claims of the holy war in which she and her family were engaged, she knew so little of her lover that she could not be sure how far he would accept such a sacrifice. It was a hard test, she admitted, to apply to any man. To ask a lover, in the first transports of his passion, to make it give place to political enthusiasms that probably meant nothing to him! 'But they are part of me,' she said, 'and he must take me as I am. It is only in this way that I can offer myself, for the conditions were there before ever he loved me, and if he is what I believe him to be, he will not refuse.'

All through the heat of the day, as she lay upon her bed, she was pondering the rightness of this post-dated cheque on her affections that she had determined to offer to Bryden at their meeting in the evening; thinking of chivalrous stories in which the women of the middle-ages had proved their lovers' love, and from these reflections a new desire emerged. Supposing that Bryden not only accepted her terms but even engaged himself, for love of her, in the adventures of her own hazardous life? The greatest dangers, as she knew well enough, were still in front of her; for though the guns of Massa's fleet and the savage levies from the country had quelled for a time the spirit of Pergusa, the hopes of the legitimist party had never been higher. There now seemed every probability that moderate liberal opinion, as represented by the deputy Vaccari with whom the Duke was already in treaty, would be ready to accept a restoration or indeed any form of government that freed them from Massa's paralysing yoke. Even the extreme Socialist party in Trinacria was growing tired of terror as a substitute for government—tired of waiting for the new heaven and the new earth that Massa had promised them, uncomfortably conscious of the nearness of arrest and execution as a reward for their pains.

It seemed, indeed, as if all intelligent opinion, for as much as it counted in that dismembered state, were ready to accept any solution that made for peace; and any such solution must necessarily be

attained by violence. The great shock was coming, in which the lives of Massa and themselves, his opponents, must be deliberately gambled. How strange, how wonderful, how inspiring it would be if in the moment of impact Bryden were standing by her side, risking his life with her, sharing in the triumph for which she hoped! Yet Bryden was a foreigner. What should Trinacria mean to him? Had she, or any woman, the right to offer love and death in the same cup?

The solemnity of the choice appalled her, but she remembered with a gleam of thankfulness how Bryden had told her once that his mother had been a Trinacrian. 'And even if there were not a drop of Trinacrian blood in his body,' she thought, 'he has seen with his own eyes the agony of this city. No man could see that and not be moved. And he has courage . . . and he loves me!' She flattered herself that, after all, the race of paladins was never dead. Always in the history of the world there had been men who loved justice enough to risk their lives for it, even in causes that did not concern them. If only her lover were one of them! Already his love seemed to her made noble by its baptism of fire. How much nobler if it should reach fruition under the same heroic circumstances! In romanticism, at least, Bryden had met his match.

The sun set; the sky grew cool, sweet, liquid. Feeling that a great moment had come Maddalena, smiling at her own fancy, dressed herself in the dress that she had worn on the night of her visit to Vaccari's house. She even took from her drawer the black scarf which she had torn to bind up Bryden's wound, handling it tenderly, religiously, as if it were a relic. 'I wonder if he will notice,' she thought. So, tremulously, she descended to the garden, thinking: 'It was here that first he saw me,' and trying to recapture the precise emotions with which she had set eyes on the tall figure of Bryden as he entered Carolina's kitchen. 'I was afraid of him. How ridiculous that I should have been afraid. And what did he think of me? Now he must tell me.'

The garden was very quiet. Carolina, it seemed, had gone out shopping. Maddalena smiled at her

good fortune. She sat down on the cool stone seat happy with expectancy, and all around her the leaves of her flowers stirred gently, not expectant but thrilling with release from the ardours of the day. Their imprisoned perfumes saturated the air around her. 'Poor things,' she thought, 'they will have to wait for their watering to-night. I can't even think of them. I shall just wait here quietly till he comes.'

The short twilight faded into night. In the square of sky above her, unknown stars were born. It was so dark in the pit of the garden that the shapes of the leaves were lost. She could see nothing but the curve of one ancient amphora whose form brought a shiver of delight into her heart. She had not realised its beauty before. 'How I am changed!' she thought. Now, for a moment, the air grew almost chilly. She wrapped her torn shawl round her, vaguely contemplating the creature that it was enfolding, wondering if it were indeed herself. She shivered.

A little later she heard a step in the kitchen and prepared herself for the moment of their meeting; but instead of Bryden's voice the next thing that she heard was the creak of the pump. Carolina had returned from her shopping and was raising water from the cistern. It would be embarrassing if the old woman found her there and stayed gossiping till the minute of Bryden's arrival, and to avoid any such awkwardness she sat on quietly in the dark. For how long she could not say. Only it seemed to her that she had waited endlessly already. Why did he not come? She remembered every word of the conversation that Carmela had interrupted. 'This evening in the garden? he had said. 'Perhaps.' 'At sunset?' 'Yes.' Could anything be more definite? And yet it was now more than half an hour since the sun had set. She was quick to find excuses for his delay. If he were in his studio, as she had expected, there could be nothing to detain him. Unless, perhaps, it were his work. But how should he be working when the sun had set? The idea was unreasonable. In that case it was obvious that he must be out of the house. Yet had she not warned him that it was imprudent for a wounded man to be seen in the

streets? Perhaps he had run out of colours. Why then had he not told her? Carolina could have bought them for him without any risk. Her anxious mind began to play with possible causes for his not coming: arrest, accident, an outbreak of violence in some distant quarter of the city. She listened for the sound of gunfire but heard nothing. What could have happened?

For a moment she was tempted to accuse her own coldness. She had frightened him away. But a man who was as much in love as she believed Bryden to be, would not be frightened by such reticence as hers; and had she not told him definitely that they would meet at sunset? There was no room for misunderstanding. To the feeling of concern for his safety another succeeded, one of deep and bitter humiliation, of resentment against herself for having given him so much encouragement. All her elaborate plans to sustain the exalted atmosphere of their meeting had been shattered. Now he might come, but somehow it could not be the same. 'I had better go away at once,' she thought. And yet she stayed.

She waited vainly, and every moment it seemed to her that her pride was suffering a fresh debasement. 'He had no right,' she thought, 'to risk a fiasco of this kind by going out without letting me know what he was doing. He hasn't considered me. Why should I consider him? How could he let anything . . . anything in the world stand in the way of this one most precious meeting. Can't he see what I've sacrificed . . . that, I, Maddalena Cammarata, should be waiting for an assignation like a maidservant at a street corner, waiting for a stranger, a foreigner of whom I know next to nothing? Why was I ever fool enough to give him this opportunity of humbling me?' Bruised pride and disappointment were mingled in the loneliness of her heart. 'If I stay here any longer I can never respect myself. It's common, undignified, unworthy! If I were never to see him again I would rather not see him now.'

With a conscious effort of will she wrapped her shawl about her and hurried from the garden. She crossed the courtyard and slipped up the main staircase, for she

dared not risk meeting Carolina until she should have regained control. Thankfully she reached her studio. There, in the dark, she threw herself down on the wine-seller's sofa and tried to repress the tears of vexation that rose in her eyes. Was this the plight to which romantic love reduced its votaries? She told herself that she was behaving weakly, more like a child than the woman she believed herself to be, but reproaches did not mend matters. In the next room she heard a drone of voices. Carlo was reading the evening news-sheet which Carolina had brought back with her shopping to the Duke; her mother, no doubt, sat between them, mute and adoring. She congratulated herself that she had come in so quietly and that all three were too absorbed in their politics to think of her. She would certainly have time to pull herself together, to put this humiliating experience behind her, before she was called upon to face them. 'What an apparition I should be!' she thought. 'It's a good thing that it's too dark for me to see myself.'

Suddenly she heard a knock. Her heart leapt. She pushed back her hair hurriedly from her face, went to the door and opened it. It was Bryden.

'I am sorry,' he said. 'You weren't in the garden, so I came to look for you. I'm afraid you have waited?'

For a moment she could not answer him. She wished that she had not heard his knocking; but since she now stood face to face with him she could not evade him. 'Waited?' she said. 'Where have you been?'

'I was delayed. I can't tell you how sorry I am. Won't you speak to me now? It is very quiet down there.' He laid his hand on her arm. She shrank away from it, feeling that his touch would set her crying again. 'He won't answer my question,' she thought. They stood together, silent.

'Why didn't you come?' she said at last.

'I can't tell you here. If you'll come down I'll explain.'

Her pride rose. Why should she obey him? Who was he, that she should follow him like a child? 'If I go now,' she thought, 'I shall never forgive myself. Besides . . . .' She forced herself to speak.

'No. I won't come now. It's impossible. Can't you see for yourself that there is a proper moment for everything, and when once that is past it's impossible to recall it? No . . . it's spoiled; it's different.'

He pressed her: 'I beg you to come. What can I say?'

'Nothing. It's simply that I couldn't . . . it's impossible. I've told you.'

'Maddalena . . . I can't leave you like this!'

The sound of her name thrilled her, but she hardened herself.

'Don't ask me,' she said. 'I tell you it's different. My joy is broken.'

'Joy?' He leapt at the word, pressing close upon his hope; but she felt that she had made a slip and was silent.

'Maddalena,' he urged more tenderly, 'you must not keep me in suspense for ever. I doubt if you know what this means to me. For God's sake don't be cruel. Say that I may see you alone to-morrow. . . .'

The suffering in his voice touched her. In that moment she felt herself overwhelmed with pity for him and with self-reproach, but, even as she wavered, her ears, straining to catch the least sound from the room beyond, heard the scrape of a chair on the tiled floor. An urgent alarm replaced all other feeling. 'You must go,' she whispered. 'Go quickly!'

'To-morrow?' he implored. But she could not listen; she withdrew herself from him and closed the door in his face.

And no sooner was she alone than she regretted what she had done, knowing that no salvation of her pride could atone for the pain that she had inflicted on both of them by her refusal. Her alarm had been needless, for the monotonous drone of Carlo's voice continued. She turned, trembling, to the door and reopened it, hoping that Bryden might still be there. But he had gone, and the blank seemed to her as complete as if he had gone for ever. 'I was wrong not to listen to him,' she said. 'I was wrong: I've done him an injustice.' And though she assured herself that she had given him no more than his deserts, she felt that in doing so she had sacrificed the happiness of both by an action for

which she could not make amends. There was only one way in which she now could right the wrong, and that was by humbling herself to the extent of following him upstairs to his room and telling him the truth that her remorse proclaimed: that his love meant more to her than her pride. And this she might have done had it not been that, even as she braced herself to the adventure, the door of the next room opened and her mother called her.

'What are you doing alone in the dark, my child?' she said.

She could not answer. 'I'm coming in a minute,' she replied; and in that minute, by sheer force of will, composed herself to face them.

So the evening passed. The Duke was in the best of spirits, and her mother, as sympathetic to atmospheric changes as a piece of seaweed, was in a glow of excitement. Carlo was flushed and restless, the Duke as enthusiastic as his phlegmatic temperament ever allowed him to be. A new message had just been received from Vaccari, in which he reported that of all the old democratic leaders who had escaped Massa's persecutions only two were really opposed to the idea of a restoration accompanied by certain constitutional guarantees, and that even these two were lacking rather in courage than in goodwill; that if, in fact, a *coup d'état* were once achieved there should be no difficulty in forming a government that would be popular. This was by far the most important news that had reached them since the Duke had taken shelter in their house. It seemed as if their days of scheming were nearly over and those of action approaching. Massa himself must have been sensible of the trend events were taking; for that very evening the news-sheet contained the announcement of what he was pleased to call a constituent assembly. This body, which on the face of it could be no more than a plausible sham created in a moment of misgiving, was to meet in Pergusa within the space of eight days, there to receive the Dictator's verdict on its functions.

'Do you think there's a man in the country who won't see through it?' Carlo asked.

The Duke smiled. 'No, it isn't intended to impress people in this country. Massa wants to convince the outside world that he's putting his house in order. The seizure of the grain-ships was a hard knock. What he wants is foreign trade. If he doesn't get it he sees he's done for. That man knows what he's about.' He sighed. 'Yes, if it weren't for Massa . . .'

'If it weren't for Massa!' Carlo repeated. 'But that is what Vaccari says. Every day it becomes clearer that Massa stands alone. If he were removed the whole system would collapse. Look at Vaccari's list. There isn't a name on it that doesn't carry more weight than any of Massa's subordinates. These men aren't our friends, but they're enemies of Massa, and that's what counts! There is only one way, sir, and you know it.'

The Duke shook his head. 'Assassination? No. Nothing was ever gained by that.'

'Call it political execution.'

'Call it what you like. I've stood against it from the first, and the fact that the risk is lessening doesn't change me.'

'But if it happened against your orders, against your will?'

'You're ingenious, Carlino, very. No, no. . . .'

Maddalena listened to them in silence. The tremendous import of their news passed her by. She was thinking of Bryden, and though she reproached herself for a lack of interest in the cause that had lately absorbed all her energies of body and mind that seemed something like treachery, she could not feel that these political passions were real. Only a few yards away from her the man who loved her was suffering, and she must suffer too. What did it matter to her or to him if Massa lived or died? She grew sick of this endless discussion on the ethics of assassination. She excused herself. 'I'm tired,' she said. 'I think I shall go to bed.'

'You cannot be well,' her mother cooed anxiously. 'Did I not say that she was not herself?'

'She works too hard,' said the Duke. 'But you know, child, that I am not ungrateful.' He took Maddalena's hand.

'Gratitude?' cried the mother, fluttering. 'Ah, sir, do not speak of it!'

'It is obvious,' Carlo continued, 'to any one who reads between the lines of Vaccari's letter. . . .'

Maddalena left them, not indeed to sleep but to lie awake thinking. Her head ached, and the darkness of her room was grateful to it; yet as she lay with her burning eyes wide open, the wrong that she had done to Bryden and to herself became every moment more clear, and to this was now added a feeling of shame in the fact that she had allowed his love to divert her from the interests of her family. 'I am a failure in everything,' she thought; and once more there came into her mind the fantastic scheme that had pleased her imagination earlier in the day: the picture of herself and her lover fighting side by side with an equal enthusiasm in the same holy war.

She saw that life would become impossible to her if Bryden's love and her political mission were at variance. If only their interests might be united, each must surely gain in fervour from the other. And this solution seemed to her not only the way out of her present unhappiness but a means to greater happiness than she had dreamed to be possible. 'If we are together in this,' she thought, 'the sky may fall on us and we shall still be happy. If only we had been able to talk it over I might have slept.'

She struck a lucifer, and by the sputter of blue flame saw that it was past midnight. The others, she knew, had gone to bed, and so, probably, had Bryden. 'Although I deserve to be humbled,' she thought, 'I cannot very well go to his room—not that I have any fear that he would mistake my motive, but because I'm in no fit state to see him with my eyes red with crying. And yet, how he must have suffered! If I could let him know that I am sorry and that I want to see him . . . To-morrow it will be easier; but, even when to-morrow comes, I shall not be able to make sure of our privacy. It is quite possible that mother and Carlo may not leave us a minute to ourselves, and in daytime the garden is always under the eyes of Carolina. When can we ever be alone in this

house? She knew that they could never be certain of solitude and secrecy; and secrecy seemed to her as important as solitude, for she knew the storms of prejudice and opposition that her relations with a foreigner must arouse. And here, again, was a reason for making Bryden definitely a member of their party; for neither Carlo nor her mother could deny equality to a man who had shared not only their enthusiasms but their dangers.

Pondering on the difficulties that stood in the way of their meeting, it suddenly came to her that the principle that had first driven her from the hills to Pergusa might be applied to their particular case; that secrecy was nowhere more easy than in the midst of a crowd. Supposing that on the morrow they were to meet in some public place and walk together toward the outskirts of the city, talking as they walked? In the streets no one would notice them, or, at the worst would pass them with the smile that the unfriendly world can always spare for lovers. Their time would be their own. They would be able not only to clear up the bitter misunderstanding of the night before but to make their plans for the future. The idea of such an adventure entranced her, and it was with a curious lightening of her heart that she got out of bed, lit a candle, and scribbled a note to Bryden.

'*I cannot sleep,*' she wrote, '*and I cannot believe that you are sleeping either. Let us forget what happened to-night. You tried me, but I should have listened to you. Only realise how much I have suffered too. I have a plan for to-morrow. Do not come as usual for your dressing in the morning. I don't think the wound will suffer, for it is almost healed. In the afternoon, at three o'clock, when the others are taking their siesta, you will find me in the city near the Magazzolo gate. Do not attempt to see me before this or we shall be running into danger. And, if you can bear it, come without your sling. There we will find a place to talk, and I will tell you what I should have told you last night if my pride had not made me mad. Now that I have written these words I am happier already. Sleep well, and forgive Thy Maddalena.*'

Tears came again into her eyes as she signed the letter. Her heart throbbed with joy and wonder at what she had done. Then, very cautiously, she stole upstairs in her naked feet and tapped at Bryden's door. 'What if he were sleeping soundly?' she thought. 'That would make me seem a greater fool than ever!' And this possibility, for one moment, made her flush with shame. But Bryden was not sleeping. Her first tap had disturbed him, filling him with tremors as great as her own. She heard him coming, and took to flight, leaving the letter on the threshold where he could not fail to see it. Even so, she paused in the darkness at the foot of the stairs to make sure that he had found it. The rustle of paper told her that all was well. She returned to bed with a beating heart.

2

Next day Bryden did as Maddalena begged him, abandoning his sling, and travelling out of the city in one of the tramcars that roared and jangled through clouds of dust toward the hills. In this passage he saw for the first time a new Pergusa; for within half a mile of the city's centre its massive houses ceased as abruptly as though the whole town were carven out of some vast and isolated rock. From this point a single road ran southward, upward, straight as an arrow, with a line of low and squalid houses on either side inhabited, as it seemed to him, by people who had nothing in common with those of the city from which he came. A neutral zone lying between town and country, dirty, confused, dishevelled, scattered with refuse-heaps and sheds and makeshift houses, as broken and desolate as the space between the trenches of two armies. Sometimes, in gaps of the houses, he caught a glimpse of the heavy green of orange-groves, their stiff leaves shining in the sun; but dust soon swirled between, and the tram leapt forward over the uneven rails as though it rejoiced in battling with the hot wind from the south that swept its seats from end to end like the breath of some beast of prey.

Before the barrier it stopped and disgorged its sweating contents, countrywomen with baskets on their knees and gaunt men with sacks between their feet. All, with one accord, pressed forward into the block that silted up before the Magazzolo gate. The wind was foul with the exhalations of vociferating men, and animals that waited patiently in the shafts of their gaily-painted carts. At the barrier a picket of the Republican Guard stood smoking and examining the papers of all who would pass it; and among the press of carts the officers of the local customs hurried to and fro in uniforms smothered with dust, irritably examining every load that left the city. Many of the country-people were drunk, disputing sullenly or loudly as the humour took them. On the terrace of a wine-shop a gramophone was grinding out a ragtime tune that had thrilled America in the year before the war. All was ill-temper, irritability, and confusion, above which the wind whirled malicious clouds of dust that blinded every living thing but the legions of biting flies that tormented men and mules alike.

Bryden remained in the thick of the crowd, for this seemed to him the best place of concealment, reduced by wind and sun to a state of profound physical misery which seeemed to him a mockery of what should be the most happy moment of his life. A batch of carts passed the barrier. There was a cracking of whips and shrill cries as the waiting animals moved forward. Bryden was carried on with them. In this crowd it seemed impossible to assert his individual will. A mule thrust its nose into his pocket, showing long yellow teeth like those of an old woman. Perhaps it was looking for bread. He patted its neck and the driver stared at him and broke into a harsh laugh, for, in his judgment, mules were only made to be beaten. The creature's coat was matted with sour sweat. Bryden's fingers smelt of it. But before the man could speak what was in his mind, he and Bryden and the animal were half swept off their feet by a savage gust of wind, and all the mass was thrown into a stamping confusion. He began to wonder why in heaven's name Maddalena had chosen such a meeting place, and if she were ever

coming. Tram after tram came screaming up to the terminus and swelled the crowd with its contents, yet he sought for her in vain. He looked at his watch; but the time of a lover's waiting is like no other and he found that he had not stood in purgatory for more than ten minutes. Another whirlwind of dust made him close his eyes, and as he did so he felt a touch on his sleeve. She had come at last.

Very slight and pathetic she seemed to him in her black work-woman's clothes; dusty, too, and pale from her wakeful night.

'I was becoming anxious,' he said. 'I have watched all the trams. How did you get here?'

'Trams? I am not a millionairess! I walked. Let us get away from this. How the sirocco burns!'

He followed her as she extricated herself from the crowd and led him round the back of the wine-shop into a lane that seemed to have been made to receive all the refuse of the suburb. A row of houses with broken balconies and plaster crumbling from the walls flanked it. In front of each lay a pool of dirty water in which children were playing, and on the opposite side a black, half subterranean shed emitted the fumes of boiling soap. 'A curious setting for romantic love!' he thought, as he watched her pick her way among the puddles, 'but how splendidly she walks!' After this there were no more houses; the roadway shrank into a path between stone walls, so narrow that he could still only follow her in single file, and then suddenly emerged into a way that skirted a grove of orange-trees in fruit, a green and gracious shade where no dust reached them.

There he would have joined her, but still she waved him back, hurrying onward and a little upward with a certainty that showed him that she knew the way. No men were working in the orange-grove. It was so desolate that when they came upon a woman who sat watching her goats graze, Bryden was as startled as were the goats which scrambled up the bank in terror. Maddalena laughed with her, the woman followed them with the generous glances that happy people keep for lovers, and in a little while they came to the oasis of a grassy slope where mountain water gushed through one

of the conduits that the Saracens had made for the irrigation of the valley a thousand years before. Even the sound of water was cooling on such a cruel day. Above the conduit stood a small fig-tree.

She threw aside the shawl that she was wearing instead of a hat, and Bryden sat down beside her. He took her hand and kissed it.

'Maddalena, can you forgive me?' he said, and though, at first, she did not answer him, he knew that he was forgiven. She did not shrink from the use of her name, and this filled him with a glow of triumph, encouraging him to tell her the whole truth as he had determined to do at all costs. Even so, he clutched eagerly, weakly, at the chance which she offered him of avoiding this difficult task.

'Let us forget all about it she said.' 'I think that, we've both suffered enough. When I came here to-day I put all that out of my mind; for I think I, too, need to be forgiven.'

In his own consciousness of duplicity he could not admit this; but the advantage that her generosity gave him was too precious to be lost. He knew that it was now safe for him to speak of his own actual humility, and the hopelessness with which he, a foreigner, a stranger, and a man of another class loved her. She listened gravely.

'These things mean nothing to me,' she said.

'That's your splendid liberality,' he cried, 'and I adore you for it; but, for all that, I should have held my tongue and worshipped you a little longer to myself if I hadn't been driven out of my mind with jealousy. Of course I'd no right to be jealous; you'd given me nothing to excuse it; but I fancied that I knew your . . . your flaming loyalty. I was hungering for you, and the thought that this man—I don't say he isn't as good as you think him—the thought that he, with all his claims on your imagination, all his advantages, was with you so often, watching you, touching you, hearing your voice. . . .' He could go no further. 'Unless you know how much I love you,' he said, 'and you can never know that—it's impossible for you to imagine how I felt. Maddalena . . . believe this of me: I'm

not a man that finds it easy to love. I'm not a boy. I can't take it lightly. And you've possessed me. I can think of nothing but you. Nothing else counts. I saw you being lifted away from me . . . out of my hands. I was lost. There was no time. I had to tell you. It wasn't a new thing. From the first moment in Carolina's kitchen . . . I don't suppose you even remember it! Why, I fell in love with your voice before I even knew if you were fair or dark or what was the colour of your eyes!'

She listened. She seemed a thousand miles away from him, and yet he still held the hand that he had kissed. Her silence agonised him.

'Just tell me,' he begged, 'that I was a fool to take fright like that. Tell me that the Duke means nothing to you.'

She smiled. 'I can't,' she said. 'He means a great deal to me.'

'But in that way?'

'In that way . . . no.'

'Thank God! That's half my battle.'

Half the battle! That was all he knew about it! His evident relief moved her to pity. 'But I must not let him know it,' she told herself. 'I must not allow myself to be weak.' She heard him speaking again, and in her anxiety to fortify herself, her mind clutched at the fact that in the stress of emotion his Trinacrian had become a little faulty according to her precise standards. 'He's a foreigner,' she thought. 'I mustn't forget that he's a foreigner.'

'Maddalena,' he was saying, 'you know I didn't come here to talk about the Duke of Riesi. You've relieved an anxiety, but I want more than that. It's you that I want. I love you. For God's sake speak! Give me one word!' He stretched out his arms toward her, but she did not stir, and her neutrality stopped and dismayed him. 'One word of hope . . . Must I force you to tell me?'

She shrank from him, actually dreading some physical compulsion. 'No, no,' she cried. 'Don't, don't! It's impossible. We're strangers. A month ago I had not even seen you.'

'And what does that matter? I love you. In love there are no conventions. Time doesn't exist.'

She compelled herself to be brutal. 'For the present we must accept not only time but other fictions. It is easy for you to say that you love me. Have you ever considered how Carlo and my mother would think of it?'

He laughed. 'Of course there are prejudices.'

'Prejudices? You put it mildly. As likely as not it would mean a duel for you: our men feel such things strongly. Possibly we are primitive.'

'We're at cross-purposes,' he replied. 'Do you think it matters a halfpenny to me how your brother takes it? It's you, apparently, who are conventional in this case.'

The accusation touched her. She flushed. 'I? You have no right to say so! I'm myself. I care nothing for traditions.'

'Then love me!'

His urgency threw her into a panic. She spoke without reason. 'I can't . . . I can't!'

He saw his advantage and pressed it: 'I don't believe you. Tell me why. Why? Why should you not love me?' But by this time she had recovered herself.

'I must ask you to take my word for it. The reasons do not matter. They might only pain you. 'Don't let us speak any more of it.'

The neutrality of her tone chilled him. She was speaking not only as if she were incapable of passion herself, but as if she expected him to reflect her own coldness. He resented it, believed it to be an affectation. He brushed it aside.

'I don't believe it,' he said, roughly. 'If that was all that you had to say, why didn't you say it the other night? Why did you come to meet me here to-day? Tell me that, at any rate.'

She was silent, for she could answer nothing. Her silence encouraged him.

'When we went through hell together the other night,' he said bitterly, 'you hadn't time to order your behaviour and think what was the proper thing to do. We were just a man and a woman standing near to death

with none of these pretences. I saw you as you were . . . adored you as you were! Once or twice I've had a glimpse of you like that since then. Now you're making yourself different, and I don't believe in the difference. Don't turn away from me. Face me, look at me straight, and tell me again that you can't love me. You daren't do it!'

She trembled, he was really speaking for one part of her divided mind, and she hated him for making her realise it. She wanted to justify herself violently, to confound the truth that he was speaking. Even if it were the truth, what right had he to dictate to her?

'You're mistaken,' she said. 'You think you're strong; but you mustn't imagine that because you're a man you can overbear me with your physical strength. Some women may be like that, but we're not all the same. Some women . . .

He interrupted her passionately. 'For me there's only one woman. It's you that I love.'

'Why do you drive me like this?' she cried. 'What do you want of me?'

'Everything. Nothing less!'

'And even if I loved you you couldn't have it. I'm not like other women. I'm not free to love. I'm dedicated as completely as if I'd taken religious vows. It is the same thing. Trinacria is my religion. It fills all my heart. It's useless to demand a place in it.'

'All of it!'

'It's madness! Suppose for one moment that I pretended to give it you. If I persuaded myself that I loved you I might pretend that I was happy. It would be a kind of blindness. But the memory of my betrayal would poison love. Some day I should recover my sight, and then I should hate myself and you and die of shame. Now will you be satisfied? That's how I stand, and nothing that you can say will shake me. Nothing . . . .'

She smiled at the consciousness of her triumph over herself; and the smile, by making her more beautiful, stung him. She seemed, in that moment, so secure, so intangible in her fierce virginity, that he longed more than ever to subdue her; but the light in her eyes told

him that he could not hope to do so with the blunt weapons of physical love. It was her fiery soul that he must capture. This love-making, he saw, could not be like any other; but though she were swift as Atalanta she must not escape him. He went on his way, inwardly delighted with his own subtlety but in reality following the track that she had shown him.

'But if Trinacria were saved, and your work completed,' he urged: 'if there were a restoration, perhaps you might think differently?'

She wavered in spite of herself. 'Who knows?' she said. 'But it is useless to speculate. One cannot look beyond to-day. And to-day your course is clear. I thank you for what you have done for me. I respect you. I believe that you love me. Let us say no more about it. Do as I beg you. Leave Pergusa and forget me.'

'Forget you!' He shook his head. 'I can't go, and you know it. Life without you means nothing to me.'

'For my sake,' she pleaded, 'if not for your own. You lay me open to the reproach of having endangered your life.'

'If there's danger it's only another reason for my staying. You may dislike my presence, but things have gone too far with me to consider you in that. As long as there is any danger to yourself I shall stay here, and you'll know that you can rely on me.'

She knew that he meant what he said, and forced herself to thank him.

'Don't thank me!' he replied bluntly. 'I've told you I love you, and that's enough. But I want to say something more. I've not lived in Pergusa for two months without seeing and feeling. Perhaps I see more and feel more because I'm half Trinacrian . . . I don't know . . . and no doubt the fact that you're Trinacrian has influenced me as well. Anyway, I've come to see that anything in the way of government would be better than this disorder and starvation, and I'm prepared to back my conviction. If I am of any use to your friend the Duke, here I am, he can use me.'

His words coming to her almost as an echo of her thoughts of the night before, thrilled her; yet though

he was doing exactly what she had hoped for, her mind was full of new and curious scruples.

'A conversion?' she said. 'But I distrust conversions. It may be true, but why should I believe you?'

As soon as the words were spoken she regretted them. It was too late. She saw how her scepticism had hurt him and, in this case at least, his honesty was unquestionable.

'You're treating me lightly,' he said. 'Haven't I given you reason to believe me?'

She could not deny it, and in her anxiety to clear herself was driven into telling him the truth. 'I was wrong to speak like that. Forgive me,' she said. 'I was telling myself: "He says this because he thinks that it will bring him nearer to me. All lovers are unscrupulous," and I couldn't bear it. Every man must follow his own conscience, and if I thought that I were asking you to sacrifice yours I should be as guilty as if I denied my own. You're tempting me to bribe you. And I won't bribe you. I think too well of you to offer you love and death in the same cup. Still, you may join us if you wish it. We are weak, and thankful for help. Only understand that this doesn't mean that I'm offering you a reward in the shape that you desire. Tell me truly what makes you offer to help us. Truly . . .'

Her heart fluttered as she spoke. So much depended on his answer. 'For if he says that he is doing this for the sake of Trinacria,' she thought, 'I shall know that he is the hero I imagine him; while if he says that he is doing it for me I shall know how deeply he loves me. In either case I must be thrilled and disappointed at once.' To conceal her emotion she turned away from him and picked from the tree above the conduit a handful of small black figs that hung tired with ripeness in its foliage. Bryden hesitated. It was difficult for him to speak the whole truth, but somehow he felt that this must be done.

'First because I love you. No, wholly because I love you. Not that my heart hasn't responded to the miseries I've seen, but because it's only through your eyes and since I've loved you that I've seen them. But I mean what I've said. You shan't tempt me with a

reward. Offer me nothing. Put the idea of a bribe out of your mind. Just know that I'm here and ready to die for you, or die for Trinacria if you wish it. My God, how I love you!'

His passion shook her more than she dared confess. Feebly, childishly, she offered him some of the fruit that she had picked. He took them, but could not eat; his eyes were only for her flushed and childish face and the provocation of her lips as her white teeth met in the fruit that she put to her mouth to hide her confusion. The pulp was as red as blood, as red as her lips.

'Won't you eat them?' she smiled; but her smile was uneasy, seeking to hide an emotion with triviality. She felt the burning of Bryden's eyes, and, in a moment, the pressure of his hands that gripped her and held her helpless. She hid her face on his breast and felt the slowly gathering intensity of his strength, yielding herself to a wonderful and terrible embrace, glad that he should hold her helpless, impressing on her soft limbs and breast the force of his desire. He kissed her face. She felt his lips hot on her cheek that was dank with the breath of the sirocco. 'This is love,' she told herself, 'this is love!' The moment passed, leaving them both shaken and her a little shy. She didn't fear him, or, if she feared at all, was not ashamed to fear; but she felt that such intensity of contact could not continue if she were to keep her senses. Her rapid pulse, her choked breath, the bodily ecstasy that was almost a pain, told her that this was the man to whom she must belong, filled her with a rapture of certainty and a deep happiness that she knew could not have come to her in any other way. It was enough, enough.

She did not dare to prolong it. With a gentleness that could not offend him she freed herself from his arms. 'You have spoiled the figs that I picked you,' she said. And indeed the fruit lay pulped on the ground where his feet had trodden them. He could not speak. Her modesty impassioned him. 'Now you know that I love you,' she said. He folded her again in his arms, and this time she took Bryden's head between her hands and gazed into his eyes. His head swam as they kissed. Only with that kiss did he realise the desperate

career to which he was committing himself. He clung to her. He was like a man shipwrecked on a stormy coast reaching with bruised hands for sand or rock or shingle, hearing behind him the thunder of a wave that will suck him back in its recoil. So, wavelike, cold, vast, threatening, Bryden's past rose up behind him. He closed his eyes, daring to look neither before nor after, clinging for life to the ecstatic present with his lips on Maddalena's. Yet fear and dismay were too much for him. 'Maddalena, you believe in me? Tell me that you believe in me!' he implored her. 'Tell me!'

'Yes, I believe thee, as I believe in God.'

'It is easy to say that now. There may be difficulties. Who knows? Love is a delicate thing, hard to understand. Huge disasters cannot shake it, but small things, small things that come out of the past . . . you know what I mean . . . sometimes have the power to change it.'

'Why should one talk like this?'

'Because we know nothing of each other. I don't know . . . Perhaps some day you will hear something of me that may shock you, wound you?'

'What may I hear? Tell me now if it troubles you.'

Bryden hesitated. He was gathering his courage to take the supreme risk of telling her everything, but she forestalled him, whispering eagerly: 'No, no. Tell me nothing. Why should I hear? Why should we concern ourselves with what either of us have been? I should be listening to the history of a stranger who means nothing to me. It is you, you that I love: what you are, not what you've been. Isn't it enough that I should believe you as you are now? Why, neither of us is the same even as we were yesterday! It is a new birth: let us be happy in it!'

So she persuaded him, for he was eager to be persuaded. In the depth of her eyes his doubts were drowned. Joy made her more beautiful.

'This is our betrothal,' she said. 'If you could know how happy, how strong, how radiant I feel! Can there be anything better than when love and duty go together? There can't be a happier woman in the world than I

am! And this is only the beginning. How secret we must be! We must tell nobody, not even the Duke, though he is like a father to me already. And yet it is shameful. We have no right to keep such riches to ourselves. If only we could spend our happiness! I feel as if the whole world should be glad with us!'

She rose, flinging wide her arms as though she would embrace the universe in one generous gesture. He followed her, caught her to him, and kissed her. She lay breathless in his arms. 'Look,' she whispered. 'what I said is true. There's a new light on everything . . . there's a change. The sky . . . see how it exults!'

She pointed upward, and Bryden, raising his eyes from hers, saw above them the barrier of the Pergusan hills over which the white sirocco was blowing a humid, dazzling sky. Wave after wave it drove on the jagged line of mountain to be broken and thrown up into spouting, spinning pillars of light, leaping into the heaven where the wind caught them again, carding them like wool, tearing them, so that they fell more swiftly than they had risen and were dissipated into an endless downward drooping vapour and spun out finely into the shroud that the lower wind coiled about the roofs and towers of Pergusa, throttling the city as in a veil of tears too hotly passionate to be shed. Like the spouting of celestial whales, like the towering wraiths of Titans harried from their vast prisons: exultant, yes, but with an exultation of wrath and terror and destruction! And Maddalena, in the joy of her heart, saw only beauty and nothing of the intimations of doom with which the sky's panoply burdened Bryden's soul. These great gleaming clouds smiled on her happiness. She became a child, and Bryden saw her childishness, which was only proper to her age and her innocence, as something that must be pitied even more than loved. Little by little her grace, her loveliness, the joy that emanated like a perfume of spring from her young body and her softened eyes, intoxicated him, producing a kind of hallucinated gaiety that seemed curiously in keeping with the haze that made dull the brilliant clarity of the landscape's

colour, and with that sense of light-headedness which the Pergusan sirocco always gives to strangers. He accepted Maddalena's happiness and his own eager returns as the mind of a man who lies between sleep and waking accepts and prolongs a dream whose existence his conscious intelligence can shatter in a moment.

Soon she drew him cautiously away from this more dangerous ground, speaking of the part that he must play with her in the coming struggle. 'Now that we know what love is we must look to it as our reward. Is not that so?' she said. Her fingers lightly touched his: the brown sinewy fingers full of sensibility and strength together, which in the weeks before she had so often touched without a thrill. This was the most that she permitted herself, scarcely knowing how much that lightest contact stirred him. In his dream he heard her speaking of the moment in the Cheesemarket when she had forced on him a confidence that he did not wish to hear. 'Now it is your duty to hear everything,' she said, 'and there is no need for me to bind you to secrecy. How I am ashamed when I think that I mistrusted you that night!'

And she went on to tell him of the intricate negotiations that their party had been conducting with Vaccari, of the slow formation out of elements of the Moderate Left of a body of men, trusted and respected by the masses, who were ready to serve the Restoration. 'You see, my dear one, we may not have to wait so long for our reward.' She even told him of the contents of Vaccari's last letter that she had heard discussed the night before, repeating Carlo's own words: 'Massa stands alone. If he were removed the whole system would collapse.' The suggestion roused Bryden from his dreaming.

'What? An assassination?' he cried.

'Do not speak so loudly. Carlo calls it an execution, and I think he is right. In England you kill your murderers, and that man's hands are bathed in blood. I would do it myself!'

'God forbid!'

'Ah, you don't know what we've suffered: you haven't seen what I've seen.'

'It's useless. That's the argument I give you.'

'Usually, yes. But this is a case in which all the work of the devil comes to us through the brain of one man, and if that one brain were killed . . . if one could stamp on it and crush it like that. . . .' She pointed to the crushed fruit at their feet.

'Don't, Maddalena!' he cried. 'For God's sake, don't!'

'You're frightened by me?' she asked wistfully, taking his hand in hers. He clutched it desperately.

'No, no . . . I love you. You're a woman. I idealise you. You're made for love, not for murder.'

'Must I not speak the truth . . . to you?'

'Yes, a thousand times yes; but your passion transforms you . . . deforms you.'

She raised her head in imperious dissent. 'You're wrong, you're wrong. It was I who spoke. I, I, the very essence of me! But you need not be afraid. You can keep your rosy picture of my mildness; for though the majority have been urging it for weeks and weeks, the Duke is against it. I cannot find fault with him, for I know that he's a good man, though I wish in this one thing that he were stronger.'

'Thank God, he isn't. He's wiser than the rest of you. He's right.'

'We won't dispute about it,' she replied a little distantly. 'And as neither you nor I are likely to be chosen for such a duty it need not trouble us. Indeed, in all this I'm afraid you must be a spectator. You cannot expect the others to accept you as I have done. A foreigner to begin with . . . I don't even know that I shall ever dare to tell them that you know. What have I told you? There's very little that you had not stumbled on for yourself: my visit to Vaccari, the Duke's presence in our house. You could not have found out more if you had been trying, and the rest follows of itself. Yes,' she laughed, 'there is one thing that you do not know: you know my name. Shall I tell you my name? my lover?'

'It's enough for me, my beautiful one, that you are you.'

'But I must tell you, for I have an unfair advantage

knowing yours, and in things like that we must be equal. It is Cammarata.'

He was silent, hurt by the sense that with her he was still masquerading.

'It means nothing to you?' she said. 'Oh, but you are stupid!' To think that you spent hours in a chapel that was full of it . . . Cammarata everywhere! The name and the coat of arms. Look at this ring. Didn't you see it? It's clear that one who observes so little is scarcely fitted for delicate work of the kind we have to do.' She pressed him: 'Is it true that you don't remember?'

'Would you expect a man in my condition to remember?' he parried her.

'No, you are right,' she mused. 'And it is good that you should want me for myself. I wish I could tell you how happy it makes me to feel that you are with me in all this. No woman is really strong unless she has a man who loves her . . . some one on whom she can count; and I think it's better that he should be a stranger than one of her own people, for their weaknesses are of the same kind as her own. Even so I am glad that you are a little Trinacrian. Your mother . . . Who was your mother, and how did she come to marry an Englishman?'

'Some day I will tell you,' he said. 'But not now. It's a long story, and it's getting late.'

She acquiesced, for he spoke truly. While they had been speaking together the day had died. Still, above the rim of the mountains, the wind blew fiercely, the pillars of cloud leapt and spouted, but now their whiteness was tinged with the rose of a flamingo's wing, and even as they stood the colour darkened through that of a ripe plum to gray, and then to the sullen hue of lead. Heavy as a sublimate of lead the warm air fell on them. In the groves not a leaf stirred, but the trees began to exhale heavy odours of night, clogging the flat and tepid air with their waste. Bryden felt their heaviness descend upon him. Once more Maddalena came to his arms and he tried to lose himself in the oblivion of their embrace. But this time, even though she yielded herself as freely and though the half-light gave

her face a strange and secret beauty, the burden of the world would not leave him. He felt a panic, as though something had been lost by his own concealments, as though she were unconsciously affected by them. 'Kiss me, kiss me!' he implored her. And she kissed him; but it was not the same. She became troubled by his urgency. 'If we do not go soon we shall never find our way,' she said. He clasped her the more. 'I feel as though I dare not let you go,' he said, 'as if it were the last time.'

'Foolish one!' she said, as she loosened his arms from her body. 'The last time? It is only till to-morrow.'

She passed on before him. In the darkness of the trees he could scarcely see her. And this was their parting, for though she turned for a moment and smiled, the crowd that clustered round the barrier soon concealed her from his sight.

It troubled him to think of her walking alone through that dark, disreputable suburb, not only because crimes of violence were common in those days, but because no citizen of Pergusa who left his home for five hours at a stretch could now return without the fear of finding his own quarter of the city isolated by barricades or his street gutted by fire. Even if he did not walk with her he might keep her in sight; but though he hurried after her she had been too quick for him. He was angry with himself that he had not insisted on her taking the money for a tramway fare, for he guessed that she had none, and though, before, she would surely have refused it, they had now reached a footing on which such help was natural. 'If she's going to walk,' he thought, 'I shall walk too,' being tempted to this decision by the certainty that he, with his greater pace, must overtake her, and thus, as it were by accident, share her company. The sight of a tramcar standing ready, packed with unsavoury people to whose faces the dim bulbs of the roof gave a grubby sardonic cast, confirmed him in this; but though he walked quickly and with his eyes open, crossing the crevasses of the road from time to time to examine more closely the figures of women, who pulled their veils about their faces and quickened their steps as though they were frightened

of him, he reached the centre of the city without a glimpse of Maddalena.

He made straight for home, hoping to find her for one moment in the garden and thus assure himself of her safety; but the place was dank and deserted as a tomb. He knew that he could not return to his studio. That was too near her. Once this degree of proximity might have contented him: now it only ministered to his discontent; he demanded more, or nothing. He felt that he could not spend the slow hours of the evening waiting, listening, thinking. Better anything than thinking . . . for there were aspects of his position that were too serious for thought: Carmela, Massa. No, no . . . Already Maddalena's matter-of-fact allusions to the possibility of removing Massa by assassination had given him an infernal glimpse of the kind of thing to which his new promise committed him. He must forget about it. Surely a lover might be trusted to forget?

Hesitating on the threshold of the palazzo he looked at his watch. It was too dark to see the time, but a neighbouring bell-tower prompted him with a sudden boom of eight. Eight . . . and he had promised to meet Carmela for dinner at her friend Domenico's at half-past seven! No doubt she was waiting for him. Well, she might wait! His attitude toward her had been definite enough from the first, but the events of that afternoon compelled him to make it a thousand times more definite. He remembered, shamefully and against his will, how near a thing it had been. 'Supposing I had stayed with her last night, as many a man stronger than myself might have done, where should I be now? Good God, to think of it!' Now, at any rate, there was nothing more to be said. Circumstances had forced his hand, a little prematurely, he admitted, but, happily, beyond recall. He knew that there was a whirlwind to be reaped sooner or later; but for the present the management of this affair had passed out of his hand, and he could only trust to luck. To luck . . . the word had a dismal sound unless his luck were changing. If only the whole business had come to him a week later! In another week his intimacy with

Maddalena might have become sure enough to allow him to make a clean breast of his position. As things now stood he knew that the very presence of Carmela in the city threatened the foundations of his happiness.

As he stood in the darkness panic seized him. Even at the risk of losing his self-respect and betraying his love he must stop Carmela's mouth. Reason compelled him to accept the paradox that only by a betrayal could his love be saved, and he knew that no sentiment nor conventional conception of honour could shake it. He had risked enough already. Even if he were late he must go to Carmela. He set off to the other end of the city, grimly, like a man walking to execution rather than a lover to his meeting. 'I must go through with it,' he told himself. 'Whatever it is I must go through with it and then forget it as well as I can.'

It was half-past eight by the time that he reached Domenico's restaurant. Through the curtains of the window, over plates of hideous fish, milk-cheeses, and bulbous stalks of fennel, he peered into the interior of the room in which they had lunched two days before. There was no light in it but that which struggled through a partition of frosted glass, separating the owner's quarters from the public room. Against this lucent background he saw the cable of an electric lamp loathsomely clustered with sleeping flies. The tables were laid, but the room was empty. Should he ask the man if Carmela had been there that evening? His old distrust of the fellow's sleepy, curious eyes forbade him to do so. No, he would go straight to her room and meet her with such excuses as came to his lips. If only he could induce himself to feign a renewal of passion there would be no need for excuses; for Carmela, as he knew, counted more on deeds than on words.

With no great certainty he at last penetrated the alley in which she lived, and felt his way through the darkness up the stone staircase. The smell of the place revolted him. It stank like a sewer. The crevices of her door framed it in an outline of light. She was there, after all, sulky and hungry, no doubt. All was quiet inside. Evidently she had not heard him. Conscious of the fact that he was doing a momentous thing

he turned the handle of the door and entered. The room smelt sweet and heavy with Carmela's characteristic perfume. Lamplight shone crudely on the tumbled bedclothes, and on the picture of San Constanzo; but Carmela was not there. The room filled him with an unspeakable, blind terror, but he could not leave it. He sat down on the edge of the bed and found himself staring at his own photograph.

3

If Bryden had known Carmela half as well as she knew him he would not have expected to find her in her room. Indeed, he had been too much blinded by the passionate events that had followed their parting, in swift succession, to give any thought to the shape which it had taken in her mind, or to realise that he had left her unpersuaded of the truth of his story. No sooner had he left her to keep his assignation in the garden with Maddalena than Carmela's instinct rejected every word that he had spoken. She knew him so well, and Bryden, in spite of his recent experience, was still so poor a hand at dissimulation. He might have talked with her reasonably and persuasively all night, but no amount of reason or even persuasion could have removed from her heart the stigma of his rejection. She knew him already as a man of few words, and for this reason alone she would have become suspicious of his glibness. That he should love her no longer was natural enough, for time obliterates old loves and sorrows indiscriminately; but her instinct told her that she was fighting with an active present rather than with a static past. He was in love. Of this she was certain. No other state of mind could inspire the spiritual distaste for her own beauty that he had not succeeded in hiding from her. He was in love, not with any precious memory but with a woman living and present, whose image was near enough to inhibit his natural reactions. And that woman, she was convinced, must be Maddalena. As for the story of his relations with Massa, the threat of a material danger to his life, she had accepted it as a fact that had bearing

upon his financial position, as his means of livelihood; but beyond that it had failed to impress her. What did she care for the twisted politics of Pergusa; what did any of these things matter in comparison with the fact that the only man for whom she had ever deeply cared had refused her and that even his promise to return had been forced from him unwillingly?

At the moment of his departure she had been too dazed by the blow to her self-esteem to realise its significance; but the moment that Bryden had gone she awoke to her own physical and spiritual humiliation and hated him for it. It was with difficulty that she restrained herself from following him then and there to the Palazzo Leonforte. Perhaps he had lied to her; but a vague suspicion that, after all, he might have told her the truth, and a dread of further humiliation restrained her.

She tried, instead, to re-establish herself by finding some other explanation for the change in Bryden's demeanour. That he was changed, and gravely, there could be no doubt. Scanning eagerly the features that she had known so well, she saw that all the boyishness that had once aroused her instincts of protection had gone. His hair was streaked with gray over the temples; his eyes were lined, his straight lips set with a certain bitter hardness that she had never seen before. The war, she told herself, had changed every one. She need be thankful that he was alive. From the first she had told him that his enlistment was an insane adventure; now he proved it by his thin, lined face. All the old maternal tenderness that she had squandered on Bryden rose again in her as she pictured to herself his changed and suffering face; but when she remembered the look in his eyes her heart hardened again; for in his eyes there was more than the coldness of suffering. Never once had they melted to her as they used to do. No man, holding her in his arms, could have looked at her like that unless his mind were fortified by another love. More, they had avoided her, without the least furtive return; and this made her certain that he had been conscious of something in them that he wished to hide; they were guilty eyes. Did he, in his simplicity,

think that he could conceal that? 'You don't know me, Roberto!' she told herself.

And, beneath these reflections, her impulse toward immediate action subsided, for she knew that if she obeyed it she would probably land herself in a situation that could only be solved by violence, and what she wanted was not to frighten him but to win him back to her. 'To-night I can think it over,' she said, as she undressed and prepared her evening meal, 'and to-morrow I shall see him. To-morrow I shan't be such a fool as I've been to-day. I shall drink less wine and keep my eyes open, and by the time I've finished with him, if I know myself, I shall have got to the bottom of the mystery. Mystery? There's no mystery. He can talk about Massa all night, but it's a woman he's thinking of.'

She slept well, as usual, and when she woke next morning set herself to improving the order and beauty of her room as though, indeed, it were a bridal chamber and she herself a bride. With a tremulousness that might almost have been taken for modesty she made the place ready for Bryden's coming, and when, in the early afternoon the sirocco began to blow and took the starch out of the energy with which she had been killing time, she lay down on her bed and dreamed luxuriously of those early days in Chelsea. There is no doubt that if Carmela ever loved any man it was Bryden. Soon after six the light began to fail. She went to her window and saw, over the flat roofs of Pergusa, the leaping pillars of white cloud that had seemed to Bryden like the spectres of Titans, flush and fade and threaten. And Carmela, with most of the natives of Pergusa, was not seeking to divine the mountain's mood but only wondering: 'When will it rain? What a blessing it will be when the rain comes at last to fill the cisterns! But unless the wind drops,' she thought, 'there's no chance of rain, and that's a good thing as far as we are concerned.'

She dressed herself with unusual care, and went early to the café so that she might consult with Domenico as to what they should eat. By half-past seven all was ready and she sat waiting in the restaurant, thinking

herself back into the days of Rufo's, waiting for the sound of Bryden's hand upon the door like any girl on the brink of her first romance. She had determined for an hour or two at least to forget all her doubts respecting Bryden; and since the faculty for isolating her emotions was one that had been given her at birth and had contributed a great deal to her life's happiness, she now succeeded in focusing her interest on her own profile as revealed to her in the intervals between the floral scrolls of the mirror on her left. She decided that she had never looked better; and she was right.

Domenico came to her side, leering. It was half-past seven exactly and the dinner was cooked. He wished her good appetite, but supposed that she would wait for her friend. Of course she would wait. The man stood by her, flicking flies from a pale bladder-shaped cheese with the end of his serviette, questioning her about Bryden. 'He doesn't look like a Trinacrian,' he said inquiringly. 'His father was a foreigner.' 'And what is he doing here now?' 'He's an artist. I used to sit for him.' 'An artist!' said Domenico with an unusually contemptuous flick of his napkin: his mouth going down and his shoulders up in deprecation of Bryden's value as a customer. Carmela rallied to her friend's defence. 'But at present,' she said mysteriously, 'he's in the pay of the government.' 'Which government?' said Domenico with a smile. 'The actual government, of course,' she assured him, and, with the words, realised that she was betraying Bryden's secrets at the first opportunity. Domenico was staring at her, his eyes narrowed with doubt. He didn't believe her. Well, so much the better. That cleared her conscience. A dirty figure in white stuck his head round the partition and began to gesticulate. He and Domenico shouted at each other as though they were on the brink of a fight. In effect they were agreeing that Carmela's dinner would be spoiled if she waited longer. It was now ten minutes to eight. Surely she had better begin without her friend?

'No,' she said, 'I will wait. He always keeps his word.' Domenico retired to the kitchen, leaving her alone. Ten minutes passed—a quarter of an hour—and still

no sign of Bryden. 'If he could not come,' she thought, 'he should have let me know.' For the moment what vexed her far more than his failure to come was the fact that his desertion lowered her in the eyes of the restaurant keeper. 'If he sees another man treat me like this; he'll think he can do the same himself. Men are like that. I wish I hadn't said that he was coming!' She waited for another five minutes. The smell of the kitchen whetted her appetite. She had been hungry enough when first she came, and had sat there starving in her best clothes for more than an hour. She could bear the combination of humiliation and hunger no more. She flounced up from the table and tapped on the partition.

'There's some mistake,' she said. 'I'm going.'

Domenico ran out with his mouth full. 'Going? But your dinner is ready cooked.'

'I don't want it. I must go at once.'

'But the dinner?'

'Throw it away.'

'That's a fine trick to play!' he shouted. 'You come here and order the best I've got and then tell me to throw it away. Good food ruined! What can I do with it?' He came up to her gesticulating in her face with hands that smelt of garlic. She lost her temper.

'Eat it! Go to hell with it. I don't care. Keep your dirty hands off me, you pig!'

'Prostitute! I know your kind; thieves every one! You don't go from here till you've paid for it!'

He caught her by the shoulder. The cook popped out his head to see the fun. 'Let me go!' she screamed. 'Money! It's the last money you'll have from me. I tell you you'll regret this!' Her anxiety to show her superiority even overcame her habit of carefulness. In the pocket of her petticoat she carried her capital, a fifty franc note. She threw up her skirt, fished it out and threw it in his astonished face. He followed her to the door. 'The change . . .' he said. But she had gone.

She ran home, fuming. There was still a chance that Bryden would be waiting for her there, having mistaken the place of their appointment. The sirocco caught her breath as she hurried upstairs. The room

was dark and empty as she had left it. She lit the lamp, stripped off her clothes into a heap and got into bed, where she lay sullenly raging. 'If he comes now,' she said. 'I'll soon show him the door: I'll let him see what I'm made of!' But he did not come, and it suddenly struck her that her position was ridiculous. What was she doing, lying there angry and starving, while he, as likely as not, held the other woman in his arms? If that was it, she could soon spoil his game. She could teach him, and pretty smartly, that she wasn't to be tricked with his lies.

She flung out of bed and threw on her clothes, this time without the least regard for appearances. She left the lamp burning—she couldn't be bothered with details of that kind, and set off straight for the Street of Palaces. In twenty minutes she arrived there, flushed and out of breath. She rang the courtyard bell, and Carolina, wondering, admitted her through the bronze gates. A strange time of night, she thought, for a sitting; but the ways of painters were beyond all human calculation. Obviously, too, the young woman had been drinking, for she did not even wish her good-evening but went on hurrying up the stairs. A busy night! Only half an hour before she had admitted by her kitchen door another man, a stranger, whom she did not know to be the deputy Vaccari. She returned to her kitchen, where Bryden's evening meal stood warming over the spent fire.

By this time Carmela had reached his studio door. She knocked loudly, for she did not care who heard her. There was no answer. She tried the door: it was locked; and when she peered through the keyhole she could see no light. She trembled with anger, for it was as she feared. Lies, lies, nothing but lies! At that moment, without doubt, he was with the hateful woman below. Before this she had always been a little afraid of Maddalena, knowing that though she was in distress and forced to paint for her living she was surely an aristocrat. She had even reverenced a little Maddalena's *finèsse*, feeling that even if it were not admirable it was so different from anything in herself as to command respect—the kind of respect with which one handles

a fine piece of porcelain. Now she felt nothing of this. These, she suspected, were the qualities that had stolen Bryden from her; the finer they were the more easily might they be broken by her hands; she would smash his pretty porcelain into fragments and see if he would stoop to pick them up.

With such violence raging in her heart she hurried downstairs to Maddalena's studio. At the door she collected herself. 'If I listen,' she thought, 'I shall hear them.' She dreaded to hear, and yet she longed to listen. Not a sound. She knocked, and Maddalena opened cautiously. Carmela could see that she was alarmed, though the reason for her alarm was only that, in the room beyond, the deputy Vaccari was talking with the Duke. The others, she and Carlo and her mother, were sitting very quietly in the outer room, speechless, as though they feared that the least sound might disturb this fateful colloquy. When she saw Carmela, Maddalena's tension relaxed. She held out her hand and smiled.

'Oh, it's you,' she whispered. 'Is it that you can't come to me to-morrow? Don't wait there. You must come in for a moment.'

Carmela did not see her outstretched hand. Her eyes were searching the room for Bryden. 'Do come in!' Maddalena begged her, feeling the insecurity of the open door.

Carmela entered; she saw Carlo and the mother, but her mind would not realise their presence. She turned on Maddalena

'Where is he?' she said.

The question threw all three into alarm. They could only interpret it in one way. Somehow or other Carmela knew of Vaccari's visit and had come to warn them that he was followed. Carlo hurried forward with 'My God!' Maddalena paled, and in her sudden pallor Carmela saw a confession of guilt. 'Ah, I thought as much,' she cried with a laugh. She stood leering at Maddelena. Carlo came up to her and shook her by the shoulder. 'Tell us quickly! What is it?'

'Ask *her*!' she laughed, pointing at Maddalena.

'Me? What do you mean?' Maddalena cried.

'Do you think I don't know? You and your painter

fellow from the floor above. Bryden . . . Robert Bryden, that's his name if you pretend you don't know it. He's a fine fellow to make love. He's had plenty of practice, though not with your kind. And if you want another woman's leavings you're welcome to him! Or if you want to compare notes, I can tell you!' She shook herself free from Carlo's hand. 'Leave me alone—you! You forget your manners. I'm not to be handled by every man like your sister!'

Carlo went livid. 'What the hell do you mean?'

'Ask her! Ask her!'

'Maddalena!'

'Open the door for her, Carluccio,' whined the mother. 'She's mad . . . the woman's mad!' But Carlo did not hear her, repeating: 'Maddalena!'

Maddalena remained trembling, silent.

'You see, she won't tell her own brother her little secrets,' said Carmela. 'But if you're half a man you'll put a stop to it while there's time. Look at her, and see for yourself if I haven't told the truth. And that's not all I can tell you. I know this Bryden better than you do. Better than she does, too. He's an Englishman, and I knew him in England. Knew him, I say! Why, I lived with him for three years on and off, if that's knowing. What's more, I don't recommend it to your sister or any other woman. He's cracked, and that's the truth. You'll find out if you try. Take my word for it.'

Maddalena still stood, pale, petrified. She closed her eyes. The mother shook her head piteously from side to side: 'Get her away, Carluccio. She's insulting. Get her away!' He turned to Carmela:

'Wait a moment. This is important. What else can you tell us about this Bryden? What was he doing in London . . . what were *you* doing there?'

Carmela took fright. 'What's that to you?' she said.

'Never mind that. You've got to tell me. You're not going to leave this room till you've told me. Do you understand?' He locked the door and stood in front of it. Carmela laughed at him: 'I don't mind how long I stay here.' He took her roughly by the shoulder. 'No nonsense now!'

'Carlo . . . don't!' broke from Maddalena.

'Be quiet, thou!' he snapped at her. He took a revolver from his pocket. 'Now, my girl, I mean what I say.'

Carmela stared at him defiantly, then, suddenly, overwrought by hunger and emotion, collapsed in tears. Maddalena made a motion of compassion toward her. 'Leave her to me!' said Carlo, and she restrained herself.

'What were you both doing in London?' Carlo repeated.

Carmela answered him through her sobs,—

'He was an artist. I was his model. His mother was Trinacrian.'

The mother came forward in agitation. 'Bryden . . . did she say the name was Bryden?'

'Leave her to me! You lived with him?'

'Yes.'

'Why did you separate?'

'He enlisted. It was the first year of the war.'

'Very good. Did he know many Trinacrians in London?'

'No.'

'Any one besides yourself?'

'I can't remember. Why are you tormenting me like this? You, a man! It's shameful.'

'You must remember. Think! Was there any one else?'

'There was a man who kept a restaurant.'

'Name?'

'Rufo.' Maddalena, remembering the Hotel Bristol, flinched.

'Rufo. Very well. Any one else? You know as well as I do that there must have been others? Do you want to stay here all night?'

'No, no,' she sobbed.

'Well, then, hurry up!'

'You brute!'

There was a long silence. Carmela looked furtively at Maddalena. She saw that the girl was beautiful, and her jealousy flared up afresh. All the concern that she had suddenly felt for Bryden vanished in her desire

to wound this woman, to shatter her hated fineness to atoms.

'Any one else?' Carlo persisted dully.

Carmela rose from the sofa on which she had crouched sobbing. She drew near to Maddalena and staring fiercely in her eyes threw out the words:

'Enrico Massa!'

'God protect us!' cried the mother.

Carmela still stood staring at Maddalena with a foolish smile on her lips, as though she expected the breaking of a proud spirit to take place before her eyes. But Maddalena never wavered, and she hated her the more. Carlo thrust his revolver into his pocket.

'You may go,' he said, and not knowing what she did Carmela moved to the door. She could not fully realise the consequences of what she had done as they affected Bryden or herself. She only knew that she had tried to smash the spirit of Maddalena, and, as it seemed, had failed. She felt that she, herself, had been defeated, and her anger drove her to snatch a final, feeble triumph as she left the room.

'I shall not come to pose to-morrow morning,' she said, with a serious attempt at dignity.

But no one answered her, and she went.

The Ninth Chapter

SIROCCO

I

FROM this silence Carlo was the first to recover. He turned to Maddalena. 'Well?'

The scorn concentrated in that single syllable scarcely reached her. Carmela's denunciation had killed her with its sudden completeness. As well waste scorn on a dead woman. Strangely enough, the fact that the model had been Bryden's mistress affected her far more deeply than knowing that Massa had been his friend, so swiftly did the personal overshadow the ideal devotion. It was this that shamed her, making her suffer so acutely that it exhausted her capacity for feeling pain. Nothing else could hurt her. Again Carlo addressed her: 'Maddalena, what does this mean?'

Maddalena felt her mother's flaccid lips, cold and aged, on the place where Bryden's had burned her. That his should even have touched her face! She could not bear it.

'Don't, mother,' she whispered: 'don't!' It's true.'

The old lady gasped. 'True? Maddalena, you must be mad!' You don't know what you're saying.'

Carlo came up to her, his face livid with anger. 'You little fool, you cursed little fool! And what have you told him?' He threw wide his arms. 'Eh! God knows what she's told him! Women . . . there's nothing you can trust them in!'

She answered him in a lost voice. 'I've told him nothing that he didn't know already.'

'Ah, he's bluffed you. *What* did he know already? Tell me!'

'The Duke; Vaccari; everything.'

'Good God! Then we're done for. I must stop it at once. Where is he?'

'I don't know.'

'Don't lie to me! It's life and death.'

'I don't know. Why should I not tell you the truth?'

Carlo ran to the door and upstairs. Maddalena could not move. She heard him hammering at the door of Bryden's room; waited for the report of his revolver and found herself, at the same time, caressing the frail softness of her mother who had begun to cry quietly in her arms. Carlo returned, pale as death, with a murderous light in his tawny eyes. 'He's not there,' he cried, 'or if he is there he's afraid to open.' The sight of Maddalena incensed him; his face became dusky with passion and a thick vein bulged in the centre of his forehead. He crouched like a wary animal springing, and then his anger exploded on her. 'You . . . you . . . a Cammarata! The child of my father, to ruin everything with your morals of the gutter! To throw yourself at the first man who sets his eyes on you! Do you think he wants you? Not he! The other's more to his taste. A competition in looseness between you and the woman of the street! You give him the lives of your friends and the future of your country. What does he give you in return? Love?' He scoffed at her: 'Love! You think you love him?'

'I hate him.'

'Too late for that. The damage is done. But, God Almighty! to think that a woman of our family should consort with that kind! Bryden . . . you can see the name stuck on a bottle in every grocer's in Pergusa. That dirt! You drab! You rotten fruit!'

The mother stifled her sobs. 'Carluccio, Carluccio, don't speak like that!'

'Be silent, mother!'

'I will not be silent. If his name is Bryden and his mother was Trinacrian I know who he must be. A Bryden, an English millionaire, married Bianca Leonforte; and if he's Bianca's son his blood is the same as our own. He's a cousin. If my head weren't splitting I could tell you the exact relationship. Let me see . . .' She lost herself in a maze of consanguinities.

'Don't bother yourself with that nonsense,' Carlo interrupted impatiently. 'That doesn't mend matters.'

'But it *does*, Carluccio,' she protested feebly. 'If Maddalena . . .'

'There's no time to be lost. I must tell the Duke and Vaccari.' He moved toward the inner door but his mother ran after him and clutched at his arm.

'No, Carlo, no!' Let us think first. Don't act without thinking!'

'Are you mad, mother? The danger . . . we're done for!'

'But the humiliation! The shame to ourselves! How could I ever face the Duke again? Carlo, think of it! This poor child!' She stretched out her arms to Maddalena.

'Why should we consider her?' he asked bitterly. 'She deserves it. She deserves more. Why should we shelter her—the loose little devil?'

His eyes blazed on Maddalena, who had sat through the whole storm apparently unmoved either by her brother's indignation or her mother's distress; but the old woman, hanging on Carlo's neck, entreating him, was suddenly shaken anew by a desolate fit of crying. 'Carlo,' she sobbed, 'Listen to me . . . listen to me!' He softened a little, fondling her gray head. 'Mother, little mother, don't cry so!' His own voice broke with the tears in it. 'Don't cry like that. They'll hear you.'

She tried to control herself. 'I can't help it . . . I can't. Carluccio, if you speak of this you'll break my heart. Haven't I suffered enough already? Oh, my son, my son! And Maddalena, poor child! It is partly our own fault. We should have sheltered her from this man's wickedness. She was weak; but all women are weak in love. Carlo, I beg you! Can't you see the child's heart is broken? Do not humble her any further!' She turned to Maddalena, almost crossly: 'Can't you speak? Why don't you ask Carluccio for yourself?'

'He can say what he likes,' she answered. 'It's all the same to me.'

The reply whipped up Carlo's anger. 'You see? She's brazen. Let her suffer!'

'Carlo! I forbid you!' the old woman cried.

'Mother!'

'She doesn't know what she's saying. The child's broken . . . I've told you. How I wish I could think! My poor head's in such a muddle. But this is what I mean: why should we confess this shame when there's no need for it? For there *is* no need for it. Of course they must be told what this man's been doing. That's clear enough. But why should our little Maddalena's name be mentioned? What is that to do with it? Didn't she say that she had told him nothing that he hadn't discovered already? Ask her again!'

Carlo turned to Maddalena. 'I suppose you spoke the truth?'

'Why should I tell you a lie? I've concealed nothing.'

'You see, Carluccio, you see?' the mother urged.

He turned his back on her. She thought he was making once again for the door and clung to him. He stopped. 'I suppose you're right,' he said. 'We need not mention Maddalena's name. We can keep the shame to ourselves. In a few hours, unless he's bolted, the fellow will be dead. It's a pity that the model knows.'

'I knew my darling would see reason,' the mother cooed. She kissed Carlo's sullen face. He pushed her aside. 'Don't . . . they're coming!'

The door opened; the Duke entered with Vaccari, and Maddalena rose. She saw the two men with curiously indifferent eyes, yet, as they stood together the contrast of types was too remarkable to be neglected. One would have said that the sanguine Vaccari with his flexible mouth and heavy rounded chin was the ruler, and that the Duke, with his air of a prosperous bourgeois, was the Pergusan advocate. In each expressive movement of hands, face, and eyes, Vaccari showed himself master, treating the Duke with a confidence that would have seemed condescending if it had not exactly represented the conditions of their relation, of which they were both aware. Even though the deputy acquiesced in the convention that gave to the Duke the title of Majesty, he did so as if he were humouring a slightly defective child. Maddalena saw this. Twelve hours before the spectacle would have filled her with

indignation. Now she felt nothing. Her own insensibility bewildered her. She was too insensitive even to feel ashamed. Insensitive, and strangely detached, she felt as if this roomful of people, of whom she herself made one, had no relation whatever to the plane in which her being now moved as in the stilly gloom of deep sea-caverns. The voice of Carlo recalled her:

'Serious news, sir. It looks as if Vaccari has been followed.'

'Followed? Impossible!' It was Vaccari who now showed signs of panic, and the Duke who reassured him with suavity. 'We grow used to alarms, Deputy. Tell us your latest scare, Carlo.'

'It's more than a scare. My sister's model's just been here with a report on the English painter who lives above . . .'

'Your sister's patient? Well, well . . .'

'Yes. Remember when he was wounded. It was on the night of the bombardment. Maddalena met him by chance, as we thought, in the streets on the way to Vaccari's house.'

'The devil! He did not see where you were going?' Vaccari cried.

'He knows,' Maddalena heard herself answer.

'But this is desperate!'

'And that's not all,' Carlo continued. 'He knows, Majesty, that you are here. And now it appears that he is an old intimate of Massa. In England . . . years ago. It seems we're in for it.

'My God!' moaned Vaccari. 'My God!'

'But how does this woman know?' the Duke asked quietly. 'What has she to do with it?'

'She's the Englishman's mistress.'

Maddalena felt herself shiver.

'Then why should she betray him to you?'

'Jealousy! She knew that my sister was taking care of his arm, concluded that the fellow was in love with her.'

'Naturally . . . naturally,' said the Duke with a dreamy glance at Maddalena.

'Where is she now?' Vaccari asked eagerly.

'Who knows? She's gone.'

'What? You let her go? Are you mad? Stop her! You must stop her! She may have given other information.'

'What if she has?' said Carlo. 'The man has been watching us for two months. He's worked his way into this house . . . into this room. The mischief's done. In all probability Massa knows everything already.'

Vaccari lost himself. 'My God! This is the end! Why did you let him into the house? It's you, you who have thrown away our lives. What can we do? What can we do?' He gesticulated in Carlo's face. 'Traitor . . . traitor! Why didn't you stop her?'

'Be calm, Deputy,' the Duke interposed. 'With the woman it's a personal matter. All she wants is her man. She's given him away to spoil his imaginary chances in another quarter. As for our friends here, they've done nothing that I shouldn't have done myself. Common charity . . .'

'Charity? My God!'

'The man was wounded in the marchesina's company. What else could they do? And in any case we've no time for recriminations. We must decide what to do, and quickly.'

'You're right,' cried Vaccari, a little ashamed of himself. 'But if the Dictator knows as much as his agent must have told him, there's only one thing to be decided. Now, at any rate, you must admit it. At the first chance Massa must go. You can't hold out against it any longer. This isn't murder; it's war. It's his life or ours.'

Carlo joined in this appeal: 'His life or ours . . . there's nothing more to be said. He's forced our hand.'

The Duke wavered. 'The idea is hateful to me. If Massa is killed it's a bad augury for the future.'

'Superstition!' cried Vaccari. 'We've no time for that.'

'Even so, violence begets violence. You know it.'

'It's a question of who strikes first.'

The Duke made a gesture of vague assent. I'm afraid you're right. It can't be helped.'

Vaccari clasped his hand impulsively. 'Thank God,

you've seen it at last! We can do nothing while he hides himself in San Constanzo, but when he goes to open the assembly in a few days we must take our chance. The plans that you rejected can stand. God knows it's touch and go!' He pulled himself together. 'I won't stay here any longer,' he said. 'I only trust I shall get home safely. If you don't hear from me to-morrow morning you will conclude that something has happened. In that case the Marchese Cammarata will communicate directly with Serena. That is understood?'

Carlo bowed. The Duke held out his hand.

'Good luck to you, Vaccari. Now we shall see . . .'

The deputy hesitated. 'But the Englishman? He also must be dealt with.'

'Leave that to me,' said Carlo sardonically. 'As you can imagine I went straight to his room. He wasn't there. I suppose he knows that his game is up. If he returns I will deal with him.'

'You are precipitate, Carlo, and I'm not sure that you're right,' said the Duke. 'Any harm that he has done is presumably done already. We can gain nothing by killing him. That in itself would tell Massa that we're well informed, and we may sacrifice more if we lose touch with him. Better find out exactly how much he knows, and what he has reported.'

'The sooner he's finished with the better,' said Carlo emphatically.

'I don't agree. Not because I dislike violence, but because we can't be sure that things are as bad as you imagine. A jealous woman! That's not the source to which one looks for truth.'

'We can't take risks,' Vaccari protested. 'You're too charitable. I agree with Cammarata.'

'But supposing you take a leaf out of Massa's book?' the Duke argued. 'If what the model says is true, it's a fortnight since Massa knew of Donna Maddalena's visit to your house. Why haven't you been arrested? Why have we remained undisturbed. Take it from me, the man knows what he's about. He doesn't kill the goose till it's stopped laying.'

'Dangerous, dangerous. . . .'

'Not at all. It's a prime maxim in war—if you will pardon me my German education in such things—to give your enemy a false sense of security. Massa knows that. This Englishman can tell us a good deal if we go the right way about it. I don't know if he's intelligent. As a rule they are more subtle than they appear to be. The point is that when you're warned against a man of that kind he ceases to be dangerous and may even be useful.'

'I don't agree,' said Vaccari. 'Finish him!'

'All your tactics are too violent, Vaccari,' said the Duke. 'I've granted you one piece of violence . . . quite enough for one day.' He turned to Maddalena:

'You are our authority on this subject. Tell me, child, had the model any reason to be jealous? Has her friend fallen in love with you?'

'Sir,' the mother fluttered, 'do not ask her! Spare her!'

'She need not answer me,' said the Duke. But he knew that she would.

Maddalena raised her eyes. 'Yes,' she said.

'Eh! I guessed as much!' cried Vaccari. 'Women . . . women!'

'Even in politics women have their uses, Vaccari,' said the Duke, smiling.' And this simplifies matters. We too have an agent in the heart of the enemy's camp. Let him continue to make love. I don't say encourage him, but don't frighten him. If Donna Maddalena is as clever as most of her sex in these things we shall soon know all that there is to be known. If she refuses to help us, I shall say nothing. But she won't refuse. Is not that so?'

'I will do whatever you wish,' Maddalena answered.

'I knew it. You'll behave as if nothing had happened. You'll submit to his very natural attentions for the sake of all of us. We'll leave it at that. We're very near to the point, Vaccari. To-morrow I shall know how the new plans develop.'

'If I ever reach home,' Vaccari answered gloomily. He made his farewells and hurried from the room.

The others remained silent: the mother humbled and cowed by the failure of her attempt to shield Maddalena; Carlo angry, sore, excited, forgetting everything

but his anxiety to put an end to Bryden; the Duke lost, as it seemed, in fatalistic dreams. As for Maddalena, she stood like a lonely pillar of stone, lifeless but for the agony in her eyes. The Duke, awakening from his reflections, saw her and sighed. He moved toward her with his short precise steps of an elderly business-man, smiled at her and gently patted her arm. 'I'm afraid you're in for an unpleasant adventure, my child,' he said. 'It is not your fault that you are beautiful.'

The kindly pressure of his hand was too much for Maddalena. She held back her tears and passed swiftly from the room.

2

In the meantime Bryden, ignorant of the many heart-burnings and alarms that he had occasioned, was fighting his way out of the despondency with which he had faced his own portrait in Carmela's room. At first he had been alarmed by not finding her there, not because he wanted her but because he felt she was only safe under his eyes. A dozen explanations of her absence, each of them sinister, presented themselves to him and were discarded. He reflected, rather grimly, that he might be grateful in any case for the fact that he had been saved the humiliation of simulating love. As for his fears, each of them was so monstrous that to be released from one or two seemed scarcely worth while. He was up against it; how thoroughly so he hadn't realised until the moment when he surveyed his own impotence sitting on Carmela's bed.

The entanglements that surrounded him were almost humorous in their degree of complication, and though he couldn't bring himself to laugh at anything so desperate, there remained the alternative of accepting his position, and finding a certain degree of serenity in the fatalism that has sustained millions of living men throughout the terrors of war. Carmela had slipped him. Perhaps she had given him up as a bad job and returned to the arms of her latest lover, whoever that might be. If so, the relief was a happy one; he wished her joy of them. Perhaps she had gone to denounce him to

Maddalena for his complicity with Massa, or to Massa for his suspected infatuation with Maddalena. Either prospect was terrible enough, but both of these denunciations were likely to overwhelm him sooner or later either from her lips or those of another, and in any case he could not scour the roads of Pergusa from San Constanzo to the Street of Palaces in search of her.

What curiously fortified his fatalism was the fact that he was happy, happier than he had ever been in his life. The memory of the moment in which he had held Maddalena in his arms beneath the twisted fig-tree lifted him clean above the path of bitter complications that he was bound to pursue, sheathing him in an invulnerable joy. That, he told himself, was the supreme moment of his life, and whatever followed could not rob him of its ecstasy. In it he had achieved a more exquisite intensity of happiness than he had dared to look for or had deserved; now he must pay for it. He was ready to pay for it. He had chosen freely and must accept the consequences of his choice. In the meantime he could do no more than make the most of what he had achieved.

Before he left the palazzo he had given up all hope of seeing Maddalena again that evening, and so he turned his steps towards the Central Square and made a late dinner in the ruins of the Café Greco. He looked in vain for Carlo, but his old friend the waiter was soon at his side with discreet inquiries as to the reasons of his long absence, beguiling him with his usual hushed talk of politics. Bryden let him run on as he would, and it soon became clear to him that, quite apart from the personal damage that the destruction of the café had done him, this little man, whom he took to be representative of the mass of opinion in the business quarters of Pergusa, was definitely leaning toward the side of a restoration. Nothing else, it seemed, was now talked of in the streets. The virtues of the Duke of Riesi, or rather the negative qualities that took their place, were being eagerly substituted for the rather commonplace vices on which Massa's propaganda had enlarged. It really seemed to Bryden as if he himself, for very different reasons, had succeeded in placing his

services on the popular side, and he realised this with a certain bitterness, for he believed that whichever side he adopted his own run was to be a short one, so that success or failure would make little difference to him.

'This constituent assembly,' said the waiter with a gesture of polite despair, 'well, what is it? That's what I ask you!' He whispered in Bryden's ear. 'Mark my words,' he said, emphasising each syllable with a waving fork, 'I shouldn't be surprised if something happened before they met!' Bryden heard him vaguely. 'Before *who* met?' he asked. 'This constituent assembly . . .' Bryden smiled. 'Last time I saw you, you told me that something must happen. You're a good prophet. Something, apparently, did.' He pointed to the gutted skeleton of the restaurant behind them. 'Yes,' said the waiter with satisfaction. 'I was right. But this time, I assure you, it will be something different. Mark my words, and don't tell any one what I've said.'

Bryden gave him this assurance, finished his dinner, and went to smoke a cigar in the empty gardens from which he had watched the capture of the grain ships a fortnight before. 'In that fortnight,' he reflected, as he sat in the dark with the sirocco playing on his cheek in warm puffs, 'I have lived the best part of my life. This kind of thing only comes to a man once in his lifetime. I should be contented with it. What right have I to ask for more? Why, after all, but for a curious freak of providence, am I not lying at this moment in the mud under Paschendaele?' He returned to his studio full of a strange, unworldly happiness, and, though the wind tore in hot gusts at his casement, slept, comforted by a vision of Maddalena sleeping as peacefully on the floor above him. Neither Carmela nor Massa any longer troubled his mind. Anticipating the worst he had cut his losses and determined to make the best of what was left to him, however little that might be. It was the equanimity of the condemned cell, but equanimity none the less.

Next morning, at the usual time, he presented himself at Maddalena's studio for his dressing. Carlo was not visible, but her mother was sitting there in frosty state.

The atmosphere of the preceding day still hypnotised Bryden so completely that he was aware of nothing unusual in their attitude, though a mind more suspicious might have noticed the anxious kiss with which the old woman relinquished Maddalena, almost as if she were devoting her to some sublime ordeal: the kind of kiss, in fact, with which the daughters of the respectable are consigned to the perils of matrimony. All that Bryden cared for was that he and Maddalena should be left alone, and as soon as this was accomplished he became conscious of a strangness in her that not even her resolution could conceal. It puzzled him, for his premonitions told him that their joy would be short-lived. He took her in his arms, compelling her to look at him. 'Tell me what is the matter with you?' he said.

She put him off, smiling nervously. She contented him with kisses, and the rapture of these so blinded him that he could not see how she suffered them like a martyr. 'She is shy,' he thought, 'and it's adorable that she should be so. What could be more natural than that she should find it difficult to meet me without reserve when she knows that her mother and Carlo are in the next room? It is a nervous adventure, and a very strange one for a girl who has never loved before. I must make allowances.' He knew, also, that such an amazing moment as that which they had experienced in the orange-groves could never be repeated, and took her new awkwardness for a natural reaction from that sudden and complete surrender and a sign of her most beautiful modesty. 'It should be enough for me,' he thought, 'that I am with her. I must use her gently.'

He did so, talking of unimportant things; yet, though she seemed relieved by this descent from the exalted plane of passion, he still could not make her out. He suddenly remembered that this was the morning of the week on which Carmela usually came to pose for her. The intrusion of Carmela, whom he had only just succeeded in banishing from his thoughts, dismayed him a little; but it occurred to him that by mentioning her name he might make sure, once and for all, that his fears of a betrayal by her were groundless. 'But if anything of that kind had happened,' he reflected,

'we should not be talking together at the present moment.' This encouraged him, filling him with a mild exhilaration of relief. He bent over and kissed the fingers that were adjusting the last knots of his bandage.

'Are you going to send me away this morning?' he said. 'Is your model coming to pose?'

Her model! Maddalena's heart fluttered wildly. How dare he . . . how dare he even mention her? She hid her emotion as best she could and answered:

'No. She is not coming to-day.'

'Then I'm in luck,' he said simply, but immensely relieved; and the naturalness of his tone, so young and so uncomplicated, filled her with a sudden, eager hope. How could he speak like that, and with his eyes on her own, if half what Carmela had told them were true? Her memory caught at the Duke's words: 'A jealous woman! That's not the source to which one looks for truth!' Her almost pathetic faith in the Duke's wisdom came to her aid; but the word 'jealous' held her, for the fact that Carmela was jealous surely implied that some elements of her story were true. She took fright again. The awful difficulty of her rôle appalled her. She could not face his eyes or submit to the caresses in which these long glances were sure to end. Anything to escape from the degradation of her own dishonesty! She led him, desperately, to speak of other things.

'Yesterday,' she said, 'you promised to tell me something of your mother.' No sooner had she spoken than she regretted it. 'For he's certain,' she thought, 'to lie to me in some way; and even though his lies would justify me in my own deception it must distress me to hear them.' Bryden, on the other hand, was happy to be released from a situation that was full of an indefinite discomfort. He told her, quite simply, as much of the legionary's history as he himself knew: of his enlistment in the Liberator's army, his wound at Roccamena, his long vigil on the heights above Pergusa, and the meeting with the woman whom he had made his wife. He did not tell her his mother's name, for thanks to the mystifications of his aunt in Hampstead he did not even know it, and suppressed that of his

father since to mention it would have condemned him.

These omissions she noticed eagerly. They pained her, because she knew what he was withholding—because they were equivalent to the lie that she had dreaded; and at the same time she was glad of them, for she needed the stimulus of some positive grievance to harden her heart against him. And this was difficult . . . so difficult! In the person of his father, as Bryden described him, she saw Bryden himself. She could not help identifying the personalities of the two men; for in the English knight-errant, who had won and married that dead and distant cousin of hers, she saw the type to which she had believed her own lover to belong. He was still her lover. It was so that she thought of him whenever she did not anxiously compel herself to do otherwise. Even if he were the traitor that she suspected him to be, he was still the man who had swept her off her feet and thrilled her with the most precious spiritual exaltation she had ever known. All the bitterness, the positive hatred that she had summoned to obliterate that memory on the night before, seemed to lose its power of conviction in his presence. 'I hate him,' she told herself obstinately,' and yet I am sure that I can never love any one else!'

Bryden was speaking to her. 'You see, I know very little,' he said. 'I was quite a child when they took me away from Trinacria, and my uncle's family with whom I lived in England seemed anxious for me to forget. My father had been rather too much for them, and I suppose they were afraid that I might take after him. But it's strange, isn't it, that I too should come to Pergusa to find the love of my life? And at a stormy time such as this! It's a kind of inheritance. I try to think backwards, you know, and pick up memories. Sometimes they're definite and intangible at once . . . I can't explain it. Why, I sometimes feel almost as if I'd known you as well . . . something in your voice, in your eyes. It's ghostly, and yet it gives one a curious feeling of confidence, as if all this were inevitable. Can you understand what I mean?'

In spite of herself she assented. What could be more

likely than that she should resemble Bianca Leonforte in a hundred ways, and particularly in voice? And how simple it would have been to tell him the reason, if this nightmare of distrust had not invaded their dream! Her assent encouraged him to tell her of the curious thrill that her picture of the pillared pergola had given him two days before. 'Every stone of it familiar!' he said. 'I had seen it clearly in a dream only a few months ago . . . just before I came to Pergusa. It took my breath away. You know that baffled sensation of being perfectly acquainted with a place that you see with your own eyes for the first time. You said it was a picture of your old home?'

'Yes.' The word Leonforte was on her lips, but she checked herself with her newly-learned prudence. 'What is this game that we are playing,' she thought,' each of us harassed with reservations, wondering just how much the other knows? It is new to me, and difficult; but he can never have spoken to me from the first without guarding his tongue. Even yesterday in the orange-grove when I was fool enough to open all my heart to him, he must have been calculating exactly how much to say and how much to suppress.

'Your home . . .' he said, dreamily. 'Then this is quite certain: in another life I knew it and loved you. Which life?' He laughed: 'No, we won't speculate. We'll only realise while we've time that this one is short. Let's make what we can of it!' He stopped, and changed his tone. 'Maddalena, what's the matter with you?' he asked quietly.

'Nothing, nothing. I'm tired. It's the sirocco.'

'I wonder. . . .' He looked at her steadfastly with pity and, as she thought, doubt in his eyes. He kissed her; and the kiss threw her into a paroxysm of distress. 'I hate him!' she told herself. 'How I hate him!'

She felt that she was hallucinated, bewitched; that the power which Bryden still held over her was a thing of which she ought to be ashamed. She wished to God he would leave her and give her a chance to regain possession of her lost self before it was too late; but, still remembering her new promise of service, she could not tell him to go, but stood dumb with terror. He saw

the pain in her eyes and tried to coax her again into telling him of her trouble.

'You cannot hide it from me,' he said. 'And now it's nothing less than your duty to share it. That's part of our compact. Tell me, what's the matter?'

She turned her face away from him. There was only one way in which she could free herself from her torture, and that was to bring the matter to a head by telling him the whole story of Carmela's denunciation and braving him to deny it, putting it to him, point by point, and, in virtue of the compact that he now invoked, demanding an explanation. That was what her heart told her to do; but though she was ready to face the absolute annihilation that his answer probably implied, she could not forget that she was bound by a later, and, as it seemed to her, a more sacred promise. It was her duty to find out the truth of all these things not by direct questioning but by craft, and, if necessary, by lies. Why had she ever consented to undertake such a duty? It was unfair. No man living could have imposed it on her if he had known that she was in love. 'But if these things are true,' she persuaded herself, 'I do not love him.' The position was intolerable. She could neither face it nor flee from it. Weakly she excused herself, bidding Bryden good-bye.

'But I have scarcely set eyes on you,' he protested. 'To-night, in the garden?'

'I've told you I'm tired. My head aches. It's this terrible south wind. Don't ask me!'

'With me perhaps you'll forget it,' he urged confidently.

'No, you don't understand. There are difficulties.'

'Tell me what they are.'

'I can't. To-morrow, perhaps.'

'I may come in the morning?'

'Yes: Oh, be patient with me!'

'Patient!' He took her in his arms. 'I know what you're doing,' he said. 'You're trying to escape from what happened yesterday. You've seen your own people, and taken fright. Yesterday you were yourself. Now, you're nothing but a receptacle for other people's influences. And that's not enough for me who have

seen you as you are. Maddalena . . . my most beautiful . . . forget them! Remember, you're mine!'

She submitted to his fervent kisses. They parted unhappily: he, wondering if in some feminine caprice of which he was inexperienced she was coquetting with him; she, crushed and tremulous beneath the sense of her own failure. 'I can do nothing,' she thought; 'I can't even think until I know if Carmela's story of his life with her is true.' Carmela's story: the rest might go hang, though she never thought to admit it. Her head ached with useless thinking. 'So I told him the truth after all,' she remembered, half humorously. 'Perhaps when the sirocco gets out of my brain I shall see where I am!'

She compelled herself to go and face the others, and found the political atmosphere of the house more heavily charged than ever. Vaccari had arrived home safely overnight and had sent a reassuring message. Her heart leapt at the news. It seemed to her a confirmation of the Duke's doubts as to Carmela's authenticity. She told Carlo so.

'That is the way to failure,' he replied with a bitter laugh, 'to believe in the best at all times. I should have thought that your experience with the painter had cured you of that. He didn't stay long this morning?'

'No, he didn't stay long.'

'And what have you to tell us?'

'Nothing. It was difficult. We could scarcely speak.'

'Scarcely speak!' he scoffed. 'I'll wager you were ready enough to speak before. For God's sake realise that we're depending on you. Do what you like. We give you absolution in advance. Surely you don't want teaching? When once you've behaved like a *cocotte* it should be easy to continue!'

'Carlo!' his mother cried warningly. 'It's useless to bully the child.'

But Maddalena swallowed the insult. It was only by such violent means that she could be whipped into the state of mind in which she might redeem her promise.

The Duke came into the room in a silk pyjama jacket, bringing with him an aura of perfumed pomade.

He too was nervous and on edge. 'This sirocco,' he said. 'Never before have I been forced to spend the summer in Pergusa. What a climate!' He became aware of Maddalena. 'Well, my child, you've seen him?'

'Yes.'

'And . . .?'

'Nothing!' snapped Carlo. 'You'd better talk to her. Much better have shot him and finished with it!'

'I don't know what to think of it,' said the Duke. 'Nothing happens. Vaccari returns safely. The painter is back in his studio. If he had really quarrelled with the woman and been what she says he is, he'd surely have known that his game was up and bolted. Personally I'm inclined to think that the model's story is a lie. With all deference to your mother and Maddalena, Trinacrian women lie like the devil!'

'If you'd seen how I had to force it from her!' said Carlo. 'At the last minute she wanted to protect him. It was obvious.'

'But if you frightened her it's more than ever probable that she lied. It never pays to frighten women. Gently, gently . . . you'll learn that some day, Carluccio.' He turned to Maddalena for confirmation, but she was too deeply engrossed in her futile speculations to see him. 'And now,' he continued, waving his papers, we hear that Massa is juggling with the date of the assembly's meeting. I don't know what he's up to; but its very inconvenient for those who are making plans to remove him. Still, there it is! The only thing to be said for it is that his new date brings the end nearer. Another three days, and then no more suspense! Possibly no more Trinacria!' He wiped the sweat from his bald scalp. 'Well, that would give one a chance of getting cool!'

Carlo reddened. This variety of *lèse-majesté* which the Duke so often directed against himself, stabbed him in the place that might have been occupied by a sense of humour. The Duke saw his flush and smiled. 'Ah, Carlo, Carlo . . .' he sighed, and disappeared from the room as aimlessly as he had entered it.

Carlo began to pace the studio restlessly from end to end. He walked with his hands in his pockets and his

brows wrinkled, pausing from time to time to address the two women with violent gesticulations, as though the mere fact of speaking his thoughts relieved him. 'Three days! If one were only sure of Vaccari! The route of the procession is already announced in this morning's paper. Probably that's a blind. Massa's no fool. From San Constanzo to the University, then past the Treasury and through the Toledo and this street to the Square. You two will have the pleasure of seeing him if he isn't blown to Hell before that—though, thank God! he will be if they keep to the programme.'

The mother smiled placidly over her sewing. A black cat, with topaz eyes like Carlo's, stalked into the room and settled down luxuriously in her lap. She put aside her sewing and began to stroke the animal's back. 'Silo, little Silo!' she purred. The words appeared to irritate Carlo. 'Mother, don't you hear what I say?' he cried.

'No, my son, I'm sorry.'

'I say that you'll see Massa on Wednesday if he isn't blown to Hell before he gets here.'

'Yes?'

'Eh! You women are too much for me! You, Maddalena, sitting there like a corpse! For heaven's sake do something! Say something!'

She could do neither. Like an unhappy shadow she left them and shut herself up in her room; but nowhere could she escape from the heavy dampness of the hot wind that paralysed her thoughts. In sudden moments of clarity or madness, she could not tell which, it seemed to her that she was alive again, that she had miraculously found her old self, she realised that the moment for which they were all waiting had almost come, and burned to wipe out the reproach that had been laid against her with some action startling and heroic.

'Why haven't they asked me to put an end to Massa?' she thought. 'I'm ready to do it, and my life, God knows, is worthless. Then, perhaps, Carlo would believe in me.' And her imagination began to play with the various stages of that terrible mission; she saw herself passing through the streets with a weapon hidden under her shawl, heard herself bandying words

with the guards at San Constanzo, humouring them, submitting to their embraces, cunningly contriving to pass them; then she saw another room and Massa sitting at his desk before her, the Massa of the foreign cartoons with the bossed criminal forehead, the small savage eyes, smiling at her over his papers; then she heard a report; Massa had fallen forward over his papers and her heart stopped beating, for she knew that she had found redemption in murder. 'But I have only imaginary courage,' she thought. 'When it comes to the point I fail. This morning I failed. I cannot even do a little thing like that. I am not fit to be alive.' And her thoughts returned to their bitter brooding on the problem of Bryden's guiltiness and of that most cruel insult to her pride, his relation with Carmela.

'It is the uncertainty that troubles me,' she thought; 'but surely it will be my own fault if I allow the matter to remain uncertain. In his presence it seems that I can do nothing: he has some power that makes my heart die within me. Why haven't I searched his studio at some time when he was away? That is what a woman with any spirit would have done long ago. I should have found papers, letters, small things of one kind or another that would have told me the truth: and if I found that he was deceiving me in small things, I might presume the greater with more justice. As it is I am condemning the man I love, on the word of a model of whom I know next to nothing . . . and here I lie, attempting nothing, passive, miserable!'

The reproach of her present inactivity drove her more and more toward this shadowy scheme; and when once she had overcome, or rather deliberately hidden from herself, the shame of playing the spy on a man who still trusted her, by clothing her personal curiosity in the guise of political duty, she saw that it would make less demands on her courage than any other plan, and rid her of her present sense of impotence. Superficially, at least, the venture would be easy. She knew that she could always learn from Carolina when Bryden was out of the house, and that Carolina must surely have a duplicate key to his studio. Probably the old woman would be shocked at the idea of trusting her with it;

but she knew that Carolina could refuse her nothing in the end.

'The sooner the better,' she thought. But when it came to the point of rousing herself she knew that she could not do it. All through the afternoon she lay there, with her door locked, in a tired stupor. Once her mother came knocking to her room and begged her to eat. She could not even think of food, but gulped down a cup of coffee that they brought her. She had feared that the stimulant would set her thinking more madly than ever, but, strangely enough, it had an opposite effect. An hour after drinking it she fell asleep. It was the first respite her brain had known for more than fifty hours.

3

When she woke it was evening. The wind had changed. She knew it, even though her blinds were closed; and with that current of clean air her body and mind seemed purified, rejuvenated. Her brain grew clear, her limbs full of a healthy languor; she had wakened as she remembered waking in her childhood after a long day's walking in the hills; only, in place of bird-song, she now heard the evening roar of Pergusa, the rumour of half a million people expressing the relief that she herself had felt. She was tempted to go on lying in the darkness savouring this calm, but her new-born vitality asserted itself, telling her that she no longer had any excuse for inaction, leading her blindfold into the adventure on which her sleeping mind had determined. She lit a candle and tidied her hair. Something within her compelled her to sing as she did so, and her mother, hearing the sound of her voice, was glad and came to her door, fluttering with joy. Maddalena opened it and kissed her.

'You have slept?' her mother whispered.

'Yes, I've slept. What time is it?'

'It must be nearly nine.'

'Five hours! How wonderful.'

'And now you will eat?'

'I don't want to, but I will. Send Carolina to me with a tray. Where is Carlo?'

'Carlo? He has gone to a meeting at Vaccari's. Do not think too hardly of him, my darling. It's a stern life that he is living. Words mean very little at such times.'

'I know, and I don't think hardly of him,' Maddalena assured her.

'How happy you make me when you say that! I have nothing in the world but you and Carlo. We are only three, and it is so necessary that we should love one another.'

Maddalena kissed her. 'Yes, my dear, I know it.'

Her mother left her reluctantly, glancing round the room, moving here and there a chair or a picture as though, by these minute attentions, she hoped to restore the domestic placidity whose loss she lamented. Maddalena sat on in front of the mirror, wishing that she would go, but too conscious of the pathetic kindness that made her delay to hasten her departure. At last, with an uneasy sigh, her mother disappeared, and Maddalena was left alone with her own tragic image and the reflection of the candle that illumined it. She sat there wondering at her own impatience, trying not to think about herself at all, hoping that the thing which she was now bent on doing might happen of itself and be directed, even as it had come to her, from outside of her. 'For if once I begin to think about it,' she told herself, 'I shall be lost.'

She wished that Carolina would bring her the tray, and, in fact, had not long to wait. The old woman bustled in with the panting and flurry of a small shunting engine and planked it down on the table before which Maddalena was sitting. Her manner was solicitous, but she did not dare to speak in face of what she guessed had been some strange upheaval in the affairs of her betters. She hung over Maddalena's shoulder with a silence that was charged with maternal tenderness, then sighed, as the mother had done, and hovered near her. Maddalena herself began to eat mechanically, and discovered, that whatever her soul were doing, her body was hungry. Eating was a distraction; the food

had the freshness of savour that comes to a convalescent's palate. She felt herself pleased, in a queer, light-headed way, with the shine of the silver and the whiteness of the linen. The reflection of the wine in the carafe took on a ruby glow from the candle's flame. She liked to see those little waves of rosy light. She smiled to herself, but could not say why she smiled, or if, indeed, it were she who had smiled at all. She called Carolina, and the old woman hurried to her side.

'Tell me, Carolina,' she said, 'is the signore in his room above?'

'No, I am certain. He has not returned since he went out this morning. It is a little before his time. When he takes his food in the city he seldom returns before ten.'

'He locks the room and takes his key with him?'

'Surely! But there is no need for it. No one enters the house, and he should know by now that we are honest people.'

'But that is not the only key . . . you have one of your own?'

'I? Indeed no. Why should a door have two keys? It would be not only an extravagance, but a danger. All people are not as honest as we are!'

'Then if he lost his key while he was out in the city and came home without it, what would the poor man do? Would he have to sleep on the stairs?'

'Of course not. I should let him in with the key of your own studio. It is the same. But,' she added, 'I shouldn't ever let him know it. Not I! One must always be careful with foreigners, even the best of them. Why, you don't say that you've finished already? That isn't food enough to keep a hen laying! And a spot more wine to hearten you? Just a little drop?'

These persuasions were wasted on Maddalena, for within the last minute the vague determination, by which she was allowing herself to be carried, had received a sudden accession of strength in the knowledge that Bryden's room was empty and that the key of her studio fitted the lock of his. She had awakened, newly determined to fulfil her promise to the Duke, to find

out, either in Bryden's presence or absence, anything in his rooms that might betray his relations with Massa and, as her heart insisted, with Carmela; but how this was to be effected she had not formed the least idea until Carolina's answers to her questions showed her that the way was open. The ease with which the early stages of her adventure might now be reached inspired her with a dangerous confidence in the simplicity of the rest. It pleased her to think that by believing it to be simple, by trusting herself to the instinct of the moment and the providence that often smiles on sheer folly, she had a better chance of success than if she had made the most elaborate plans. Her heart was beating not with fear but with an adventurous exaltation as she stole upstairs with the key of her studio in her hand and knocked at Bryden's door.

There was no answer to her knock. The luck, in which she had already so unreasonable a belief, still held. She unlocked the door and opened it. The room was in darkness but for the lucent indigo of night that glowed faintly through the northern light. Fool that she was, she had forgotten to bring matches with her! Should she go downstairs again and fetch them? There was no time to waste. She groped on the mantelpiece with a happy sureness, for this room was almost an exact copy of her own. Matches she did not find, but her fingers fell on the smooth cylinder of an electric torch. The battery inside it was almost exhausted, but by its light she found a packet of lucifers that her hands had missed. She had to strike three before she could get one to light, and even then it burned too slowly for her haste with a sputtering phosphorescent flame like the torch of a glow-worm. She found a candle on the top of the American desk, and by its feeble and rather melancholy light surveyed the field of her adventure.

This was Bryden's room. How often during the last week she had wondered what it could be like! Now its simplicity and bareness, reflecting, as it seemed to her, those qualities that she had found most admirable in the man himself, filled her with shame: its emptiness with panic. The table was laid for lunch; but the

midday meal stood there untouched: a plate of macaroni that had gone cold and glutinous, a hunk of bread, a full bottle of wine. 'He has not eaten,' she thought, 'he must have been as miserable as I was. What if I have wounded him without reason?'

There, in the lonely candle-light she stood, and the room accused her of injustice, of duplicity, of want of faith. Wherever she turned the influence of Bryden, her first, idealised Bryden, spoke to her; and most of all that frugal meal, and those inanimate materials of his art with which the place was littered seemed to offer her a dumb assurance of his innocence and industry. She knew that she must not listen to them. Even the quietness of the place was frightening: a quietness that was intensified by one small noise—the monotonous creaking of a goat-moth larva buried in the immature poplar-wood of Bryden's painting-stool, gnawing at the wood with tiny, resolute jaws. The sound hypnotised her so completely that she had to make an effort to wake herself. Why had she come there, and what must she do next? Up to this point she had followed her instinct as blindly as the caterpillar eating its way through the poplar-wood; but here her instinct left her stranded and impotent. She had come there in search of some evidence that might either perpetuate the horror of the nightmare that held her in its power or give her relief. The bareness of the room mocked her. Evidence! What evidence?

She began to search helplessly, looking first into the pockets of Bryden's painting-coat that hung on the stool in front of the easel. There she found nothing to her purpose. Next she attacked Messiter's bureau. The roll-top puzzled her at first, for she had never seen anything of the kind at Leonforte, but it soon yielded its secret, and the fact that it was unlocked contributed to her hopes and her despair. Was it conceivable that a skilled political agent in the pay of Massa would leave evidences of his trade in an open bureau? She worked through the contents of drawer after drawer with her candle held high, finding only masses of Messiter's rubbish: unintelligible press-clippings from an American agency: picture post cards from some

woman friend of his in Venice scrawled with commonplaces in a bold, round, Saxon hand. 'Some other woman!' Maddalena thought. She was glad to find even this spur to her energies. Another drawer. Bryden's passport, and, pasted on it, a photograph of himself as he had emerged from his first experiences of a Trinacrian prison. Across the bottom of the photograph ran a bold signature. The name by which he had made himself known to them. A lie! It was stamped with the visa of the Pergusan police. Was it a lie? The signature seemed to her natural, downright, fluent. Supposing that this, after all, were his true name, and Carmela's substitute a fiction? Bryden . . . What English name could seem more obvious to the mind of an ignorant Pergusan: a name that, as Carlo had told her, could be seen on a dozen bottles in any Pergusan wine-shop! Here was the other, boldly signed, attested by the circular stamp of the police. Massa's police: that meant nothing . . . nothing!

A board started, and she turned round in fright, spilling wax from the candle on her hand that held the passport. The wax spat upon her cold fingers and congealed there. She felt it going stiff, but could not think to remove it. If he were coming . . . But he did not come. The ancient timber having stretched its uneasy fibres relapsed once more into sleep. Now she heard nothing but the creak-creak of the caterpillar's jaws chewing the poplar wood into pulp. A ghostly and hateful noise: she wished she could stop it; but there was no way of doing so. Her eyes, that had tried in their alarm to penetrate the darkness at the other end of the room, returned to the passport and to the photograph of Bryden; and the eyes of Bryden stared at her out of the picture, steadily, reproachfully, like those of a dead man set on his murderer. Against the face of this portrait she could feel no hatred. This was the man whom she had trusted and even loved, not the changeling whose image her nightmare had given her. She dared not gaze on it any longer, but folded the noisy parchment and passed on to the drawer beneath.

A find at last: papers, written in the firm hand of the passport signature. She pulled them out hurriedly,

and as she did so, something metallic fell into the bottom of the drawer. A ring. She put the papers on the desk and held it up to the light. It was Carlo's signet, graven with the crest of the Cammarata arms. Carlo had lost it, she remembered, on the night when Bryden had rescued him; but how had it found its way into Bryden's bureau? Surely he must have known to whom it belonged? Her mind took her back swiftly to the words with which she had rallied him on his lack of observation in the cathedral chapel. Even if he had not known before it was certain that he knew now. Why, then, had he not returned the signet? Was he not only an informer but also a thief? Even though this was unthinkable, she burned with a new indignation. Slipping the ring on one of her fingers she returned to the papers.

Uppermost lay the unfinished report to Massa that Bryden, in his strength or weakness, had begun to write on the night of the bombardment. It was written in English, and most of it she could not understand; but she saw the words Leonforte, Farace, Cammarata, and these were enough. Her heart began to beat violently: her head swam. Tears rose in her eyes and blinded her so that she could read no more: a flood of tears that swept away the last fragments of her resolution and her courage. In front of Carmela, the presence of Carlo and her mother, her pride in herself and a passionate unwillingness to accept the word of another woman against that of Bryden, had steeled her into an unnatural control. Now that she was alone—how utterly alone!—her pride was broken, and Bryden stood condemned in the evidence of his own hand. Her spirit died within her. This was the end. She stood sobbing her heart out over the papers on the American bureau, tormented by the piteous sound of her own choked sobs and the creaking of the caterpillar that pursued its humble work of destruction in Bryden's stool. She heard the scrape of another key in the lock; she heard the door opened as Bryden entered the room; but now she could feel neither alarm nor pain nor humiliation. Nothing, she knew, could touch her; for her heart was broken . . . broken.

4

Of these two creatures, meeting once more to face the most impressive moments of their lives, it is difficult to say which was the more worn and tormented. The time that Maddalena had spent in a stupor of exhaustion had been consumed by Bryden in a hot and futile activity. It was not until he had left her that he realised the full significance of his dismissal, the finality that she had disguised beneath faint promises. Looking backward he remembered that of herself she had given him nothing; that every shade of kindness or familiarity had been forced from her by his own protestations. He tried to comfort himself with pity: 'The poor child was ill: she told me so; and this sirocco is enough to take the starch out of any one.' But even so he was not persuaded. He told himself that her behaviour was nothing but a reaction of modesty against her surrender of the day before. 'But there again I am wrong,' he said. 'I am judging, by our tepid English standards, a woman who is all fire.' True, she had spoken of 'difficulties.' What difficulties? No doubt the nearness of her own family—people who would certainly be prejudiced against him as a lover—might weigh with her a little; but the solitude of her studio had been as complete as that of the enchanted orange-grove; so safe that she had not shrunk from his arms or denied him her lips. What she had really denied him was her soul. She had hidden her soul from his eyes, and for the reason that there was something in it that she wished to conceal from him. What could that thing be?

He tried to find for himself a reassuring answer, but was driven back time after time upon the word 'Carmela.' He told himself that he had tested her on this very point. He had taken his courage in his hands and compelled himself to ask her if Carmela were coming that morning to pose. He had watched her, and she had answered without tremor or blush. Was it possible that he had been deceived? Now that he could consider

their interview as a whole the possibility became probable. Last night his futile search for Carmela had seemed a little sinister: now it seemed mortally significant. A murderous anger rose up in his heart. 'If she has betrayed me,' he cried, 'by God, I'll kill her!' He meant what he said. A life for a life!

Carolina tapped at the door with his lunch. He opened to her and waited fretfully while she arranged the dishes on the table. As a rule the old woman liked to stay and gossip, with her hands on her hips; but she soon realised that he was in no mood for talking, and as soon as she had gone he left his food steaming on the table and went out, locking the door behind him.

He hurried straight across the city to the warren in which Carmela lived. This time he had no difficulty in finding it. He ran up the stairs and hammered at her door. The room was locked, and rather than be beaten he knocked up one of the neighbours, a fat slut of a woman, to find out where she had gone. She answered him with questions. What did he want? Was it that the young woman owed him money? He calmed her suspicions; told her that he was an artist and that he wanted Carmela to sit for him.

'In that case you're too late,' she told him. 'The young woman's gone.'

'Gone? What do you mean? How do you know?'

She smiled at his agitation. 'When I say "gone" I mean "gone,"' she said. 'And nobody has a better right to know than I have, seeing that it's my room she's been living in. A quiet young woman, and nicely-spoken; but I fancy that things haven't been going too well with her, which is not surprising when you consider that the whole world is upside-down. This morning she came and told me that she couldn't pay my price. "Well," says I, "if you can't there's others that can, and plenty of them. When.do you want to go?" "This very day," says she, and though I told her that I'd no objection to her staying on a week till something turned up, she packed up her things on the spot and went. And there you are! If she'd have waited another four hours, no doubt you'd have offered

her an honest employment! *Honest*, I say, as if I didn't know what you painters were! But then there's more in human nature than the holy church allows for!' And she gave him a knowing smile.

'You can't suggest where she has gone?' said Bryden, offering her money.

She took the coin greedily. 'I can see that your lordship is a foreigner and would have been kind to her,' she said, 'but if the holy angels asked me that question, I could tell them nothing.'

Bryden was forced to believe her, being only thankful that she hadn't put him on a false track for the sake of giving him something for his money. If Carmela had gone, as he suspected, out of fear for the consequences of her betrayal, it was unlikely that she would leave any clue behind her. The fact that she had disappeared in this way confirmed his certainty of her guilt, whipped up his impotent anger and sent him off more wildly than ever on his blind search. If ever he found her she need expect no pity. He went downstairs like a madman, and the fat woman leaned idly over the balustrade to see what he would do until the darkness of the filthy stairs concealed him.

He cut across obliquely to the restaurant where they had dined. 'She was expecting you last night,' said the proprietor. 'If you will sit down and eat here, no doubt she'll turn up.' He pulled out a chair and dusted it with his dirty napkin. Bryden, in his bewilderment, consented. He drank down the bottle of wine that stood waiting on the table, but before the meal was ready he had changed his mind. He called for the proprietor, paid for the food that he had not eaten, and left him staggered by this second windfall.

'I will tell the lady that you called,' he said obsequiously.

'You'll oblige me by doing nothing of the kind,' Bryden replied. He was in two minds whether to make the fellow his confidant and ask him to send an urgent message to the palazzo if she turned up, but decided that it would be unwise to trust him. He went out into the street, his head flushed and swimming with the wine he had drunk on an empty stomach. He stood on the

pavement, cursing himself for his weakness in having swallowed the heady stuff.

For all that, it had excited his confidence in himself and made him feel that if he tramped the streets long enough, blind fortune might bring him face to face with Carmela. 'I can do nothing else,' he thought; 'for now that I am morally sure of what has happened it is impossible for me to return to the palazzo. I'm finished . . . done for! All that remains to me is the privilege of wringing this wretched woman's neck. By God, what couldn't I do to her!'

So, like a madman, he went on stalking through the mazy Pergusan streets, so rapt in his anger that if he had seen Carmela he would hardly have recognised her. Children shouted after him as he went, and men who lounged at their doorways stared at him curiously as a foreigner who, more luck to him! had a bellyful of wine inside him. He walked endlessly, till the lightness of the wine went out of his legs. He grew faint and sleepy with a leaden tiredness, and as his strength failed his anger died within him. He sat down stupidly in the shade on one of the stone seats of the park, to which his feet had carried him. Now he no longer wanted to find Carmela, for he knew that there could be no satisfaction in finding her, that neither reproaches nor violence could mend the wrong that had been done. Only he found a certain savage satisfaction in thinking that she had run away from him, that fear of him had driven her from her room, and even this was gradually tempered by pity. 'Poor devil,' he thought, 'she's done for herself as well as me!'

With a tiredness that was almost a substitute for content his thoughts subsided. He accepted this as the end of his adventure. It had ended in failure, in the wreck of every human relationship on which he had ever counted. He had failed Massa; he had failed Maddalena; even with Carmela he had been a failure. Well, there was one comfort. Now nothing mattered.

And yet, in his exhausted and fuddled brain, his instinct of self-preservation was already at work, roughing out the modified lines on which his future must be laid. He did not wish to think of this, or, indeed, of anything;

but in spite of these abnegations the central control of all his broken forces was organising retreat and perhaps salvation. As soon as it should become possible for his limbs to act, this counsellor told him, he must return to the Palazzo Leonforte and retrieve his personal effects. They were little enough, God knew! Why should he even run the risk of returning and sacrificing more of his peace of mind? First, because the remains of his paper money were in his bedroom. So he argued; but even more than his money he remembered the reports to Massa that lay unfinished in the American bureau, and Carlo Cammarata's signet-ring.

The thought of this last worried him, curiously enough, more than anything, for he could not think what to do with it. If it were left behind in the drawer Carolina must surely discover it, and her employers would get the idea that he was not merely an informer but also a thief. He told himself that it was a much smaller thing to be a thief than an informer; but his pride revolted against the second name, and he decided that the ring must be removed at all costs and thrown away in some convenient gutter. The picture did not please him. He saw himself leaving the palazzo stealthily in the middle of the night, having burned his papers. Burned his boats . . . his mind played with the word. And then? Then he must disappear. Into the country—into the fastnesses of the hills where other political fugitives were hiding, waiting for a turn of the tide. But Bryden had no tide to wait for: neither side would welcome him, seeing that he had betrayed them both. Into the harbour . . . He remembered the translucent water that had glowed beneath the fishing-flares like a sombre emerald on the night of his landing from the *Boston Hall*, and smiled. It didn't much matter what the end might be as long as it were definitely the end.

He could not think any more. His head ached violently from the wine inside it and the glare without. Even beneath the ilex those brazen hammers of the afternoon sun beat through his skull. He curled himself up on the bench, protecting his eyes with his folded arms. Nobody came near him. Once, when he opened

them, he saw a green lizard, expectant in the dust, that fixed him with a beady, glittering eye; and when he roused himself again, facing the golden glare, the creature was still there, motionless between the stealing shadows. Sometimes, as he dozed, the sirocco rose out of its languor, and he heard its gusty progress as it swept through the trees with the sound of a breaking wave. And at last, without knowing it, he slept.

He awoke cold and stiff. The wind had changed. The sky was full of dancing stars. He pulled his strength together; steadied his aching legs, and turned without hesitation in the direction of the palazzo. His watch had stopped so that he had no idea of the time; but he knew that he would have the cover of darkness for his farewells. There was no reason why he should be seen by any one—even by Carolina. It gave him a certain satisfaction to think that he had paid the old woman his rent in advance. That, at any rate, counted for virtue. Approaching the bronze gates of the palazzo he wondered if he could bring himself to write a letter to Maddalena—not with the idea of justifying himself, but simply for the satisfaction of having told her the whole truth. He abandoned this idea, not because it was difficult, but because he knew it was useless. The past was dead: better bury it in silence. Yet, if she had regrets, the knowledge of the truth might console her? She could have no regrets: she would be strong enough to forget him.

He stepped softly up the marble staircase. 'For the last time,' he thought. 'God, what a madness life is!' He put his key gently in the lock. There was a light in the room. Moonlight? No, there was no moon. Then he heard the sobbing of Maddalena and saw her crouched above the papers on the American bureau, her single candle flaring beside her.

At this his resolution left him; for a lover can bear anything rather than the tears of the woman he loves. She turned, and saw him, then broke down pitifully again, putting her hands in front of her eyes so that she could not see the agony in Bryden's face nor his outstretched arms. Tears came into Bryden's eyes as well. In that moment he was not even conscious of

the breach that separated them, seeing nothing, feeling nothing but the distress of her frail, sob-shaken figure. He did not know what he was saying: 'Maddalena, my love, my darling . . . for God's sake don't do this! You're killing both of us!'

Into her dead mind there came a flush of bitterness which she sorely needed, for the fact that she could not control her sobs confessed more than she would have let him know. 'Both of us!' she thought. 'He's thinking of himself. What right has he to do that?' But she could not speak to him. His fingers caressed her hair; his face was wet with her tears. 'But it doesn't touch me,' she thought, triumphantly'; it means nothing to me; he no longer affects me as a living person; I'm like marble.'

'Speak to me!' he pleaded. But she would not speak. Why should she speak? If only these tears would cease to shake her! And still his hands fondled her unresponsive body. Only two days before she had trembled when he touched her. Now, thank Heaven! she needed no effort to steel herself against him; and this fact gave her some of the courage that she needed. If she had spoken, as he still implored her to do, her purpose might have been shaken. Even though she were still in the power of an emotion that mastered her body, she now knew that her suffering was due less to her disappointment in Bryden than to the laceration of her pride. Nothing in him, she told herself, could move her. There was nothing between them but a declared enmity. He was no more than a spy, and she herself engaged in a desperate attempt to counter his machinations. Both of them had failed in their attempts at secrecy. It was a drawn battle, from which either side might retire without emotion.

She stretched herself, freeing her body from his arms, and rose to her feet with a face that was almost calm. Without a word she handed him the condemnation that he had written with his own hand. Even more than the written page her eyes accused him. He took the papers mechanically.

'I know,' he said hoarsely. 'I wrote them. If you will listen to me I'll tell you.'

What did it matter to her if he told her anything or nothing? It was too late for protestations. She kept her silence.

'They are reports,' he said. 'As they're written in English you probably can't understand them.'

'Enough,' she forced herself to say.

'I'll translate them.'

'It's unnecessary. There are names.'

'Very well, I won't. But you should notice that they are not finished. Also that they're here in this room. In other words I haven't sent them.'

An undeniable thrill of thankfulness seized her. If what he said were true! At least she had gained something by this evening visit. Let him talk, let him protest! Perhaps she might learn more. Her silence encouraged him.

'They were never sent,' he continued, eagerly. 'You see? They're worthless. Waste paper!' He tore the sheets in half.

This action roused her. She felt that the papers were her property by right of discovery. 'Don't!' she cried, holding out her hand to rescue them.

'As you wish. Keep them,' he said. He handed her back the torn papers, embarrassing her, for now that she had got them she didn't know what to do with them. Luckily they found employment for her fingers. She clutched them as if they gave her a new stability, and in that movement Bryden became aware of her fragility, her weakness. He knew now that he could compel her to hear his case.

'We are strangers again,' he admitted. 'I suppose, in fact, we were never anything else. But now that this has happened and we see where we stand, I want you to hear the truth . . . every word of it. For your own sake as well as mine you must listen.'

She half-smiled again at his insistent egotism; but this time she felt no indignation. 'Let him speak,' she told herself, 'not because I want to hear him myself but because it is essential that we should know.'

'Even my name you don't know,' he began. 'It is Bryden. Robert Bryden.'

He saw by her eyes that this was no news to her. 'You know?' he said. 'Yes . . . Carmela told you.'

She felt herself going pale. It was strange, she thought, that this woman's name should still have power to move her. Why should she be frightened of it? She compelled herself to speak it, echoing: 'Yes . . . Carmela.'

'One piece of truth at least!' he said, bitterly. 'I've told you already that my mother was Trinacrian. She died young: I scarcely remember her. After that I had a hell of a childhood. I don't mean that I was cruelly treated . . . only that for a child of my make it was hell. In all that time there was one thing that sustained me: my passion for my mother's memory and her country. I considered myself not English but Trinacrian. I was drawn to everything Trinacrian wherever I found it.' Her eyes said to him: 'Carmela?'; but he had to tell his story in his own way.

'I was brought up in the confined atmosphere of an industrial city, among people that were deadly conventional. I was an artist. I may not be a good one, but that is how I was born, and I hated the conventional in every form that I met it. I grew to hate their politics. I became a Socialist. I was just driven to the other extreme by opposition of temperament. It seemed to him that he saw her shrink from the word. 'Don't forget that your friends Vaccari and Serena are Socialists,' he reminded her.

'I said nothing,' she replied.

He laughed. 'In this way I met men of advanced ideas, and among them Enrico Massa. Massa, to you, is just a demon of blood. I knew him before any of his theories had materialised. Whatever you think of him you can't deny his power. Even in this country he has compelled millions of people to believe in him. And I believed in him. He told me his dreams, and I thought they were beautiful and right. I'm what you people would call a crank. There's no word for it in Trinacrian. Well, I can't help that. Artists often are. Their gift of imagination—curse of imagination, if you prefer it—makes them see further than other people. Then I was hammered in the war, and I came out of it with a

deeper sense than ever of social injustice. I saw how the diplomatic bluffs of a few elderly men could sacrifice the hopes and lives of millions of youth. I heard of the revolution here; saw that Massa was gradually controlling it. I thought I saw Massa's dreams—my own dreams—taking shape. And in Trinacria! Think what that meant to me! I moved heaven and earth to get to him, to help him. I came here at the risk of my life. In those days my life wasn't worth any more than it is to-day. Why, Massa himself, if I hadn't caught him in a sentimental mood, would have had me shot the day after I landed.'

She interrupted him: 'You told me that you had been painting in the South: that the revolution had caught you here?'

'Yes. It was a lie. Listen to me now. I begged Massa for work . . . any work, and he gave it me. My work was to watch you and your friends and to report on your movements. You know that already; but what you don't know is that from the first I was a failure. It didn't suit me. Although you mayn't think it, I'm a bad hand at telling a lie or living one. From that day to this—and it's the solemn truth, as God knows—I've never seen Massa. My reports were to be sent to him under the name of Rufo, our friend Rufo of the Hotel Bristol . . . you remember?'

She assented. 'Even then he was deceiving me,' she thought.

'Now what I tell you is true,' he went on. 'I've nothing to gain, and I've lost everything. What I tell you is as credible as the word of a dying man. I've sent Massa only one report, and that was a confession of failure. On the night when we went together to the Hotel Bristol I received his reply. I opened it while you left me to go to Vaccari's house, and what it asked me to do was to establish your connection with Vaccari. When I came home I wrote the report that you hold in your hand. You see it was neither finished nor sent. Look for Vaccari's name in it. Look! It isn't there. I'd given you a promise, and I kept it. Look!'

He spoke so urgently that she found herself obeying him. She looked at the torn paper. If Vaccari's name

had been written in it her eyes would have discovered it already. 'No, it is not there,' she confessed. 'I knew that already.'

Bryden trembled with an agony of emotion; his voice was strained, harsh, rapid. 'And you know,' he said, 'why that name isn't there, why the report was never finished. Because I'd seen you, because I loved you. I'd never known an ideal love in my life before, except that which I had for Trinacria. You had become identified with Trinacria to me. All the love and passion of which I was capable had become concentrated on the idea of you. There was no room for anything else. You . . . only you! That paper represents the last struggles of what I called my conscience. After that I had no conscience left. In place of it nothing but love. I lied to you . . . I'd have told you a thousand lies to protect my love. But not one of them mattered. Beneath them my soul was as utterly true to you as—God help me! it is now. I can see that it pains you—you, who are so splendidly straight—to think of my lies. I can't help that. I must tell you everything: you've got to see me as I am: me—to my last, pettiest baseness. Doesn't it trouble you that I failed Massa . . . such a cynical betrayal? I've told you, I'd scrapped my conscience. Then, little by little, I found a substitute for it. I don't know. I suppose I'd come to see things through your eyes by trying to identify my interests with yours. I became converted. You don't believe in conversions? Conversions by love? It sounds like a *feuilleton*, but it's true. I can put it more fairly: it was the sufferings of you, personally, that opened my eyes to the sufferings of the rest. I'm not made for neutrality. I'm a fighter; my mind needs enthusiasms, my body loathes idleness. That's why I put myself at your service: that, and the other reason that you know of. It was an impulse that dictated the decision; but when I'd made it I believed I was right. After that we met, and I told you that I loved you. That was the richest moment of my life; I felt that I could ask nothing more of destiny; but when I held you in my arms the whole past rose up behind me and mocked me. I knew that I'd got you

on false pretences: all the joy and the triumph fell away from me. And you didn't know: that was the bitterest part of it.' He turned on her quickly: '*Did* you know, did you guess the least part of what was in my mind?'

She was forced to answer him. 'No. Nothing . . . nothing.'

'But what could I do?' he cried. 'I wanted to tell you, but I couldn't. I wasn't sure of you. It was difficult to believe in my own good-fortune and I had so much to lose that I didn't dare to risk it. And now I've lost everything. Maddalena, what would you have said if I'd told you all this the other day?'

She answered truthfully: 'How can I tell you? I don't know . . .'

'No, it's an idle question. It's over and done with. Perhaps the result would have been the same, and yet, if I'd told you then, I should have had nothing to reproach myself with. As it is there's not only the loss but the remorse. What I've lost I can't recover—I know that—but at least I can ease my bitterness by serving you. If you could tell me that you believe what I've told you . . . if you could consent to prove my sincerity by some ordeal! It's fantastic; I've no right to suggest it; but that is what I ask you.'

He played his last card boldly, though it had come into his hands without premeditation, for in it he saw his only chance of remaining near her, and even if she could not love him, the sight of her distressful beauty so held him that he had conceived the hope of living for a little while within reach of it. And she, too, had been moved by his words, by the pain in his voice that told her of their awful sincerity, and by a kind of passionate pride that shone in his eyes as the burden of duplicity fell from him and his manhood reasserted itself. He had no need of protestations to persuade her into belief. She knew that for his own sake he had rid himself of every shred of dishonesty; that this was the testament of one who had nothing to lose and believed he had nothing to gain; and in this burning sincerity she was thrilled, in spite of herself, to see the man whose image she had banished from her mind, so that to the impulse of pity, which the cruelty of his situation

and his hard confession of cowardice aroused in her, was added a feeling of obligation to meet his candour with a generosity as pure, and to grant him the test which he claimed for the salvation of his soul. Only one reservation restrained her, and, though she was ashamed of it, it was too strong for her. Carmela . . .

Throughout his story and his last, impassioned pleading he had only mentioned that name once, and then, as it seemed to her, scornfully. Yet, if Carmela had been to him as much as she claimed, he had no right to dismiss her with scorn. Carmela was a woman like herself, a woman who had loved him, and the parallel frightened her. 'That is how men use women,' she thought, hardening herself against him and investing the figure of Carmela with a vicarious pity that suited her purpose. 'A callous ingratitude,' she thought, 'towards the woman to whom he really belongs!' And the picture of the discarded mistress whom she, in her ignorance, had replaced, stung her into a new indignation against him in which she forgot the graver, impersonal problem that was involved. It would have been easier to keep these thoughts to herself, but still Bryden pressed her for an answer to his appeal; and, feeling that her silence was unworthy, she forced herself to speak, evading his question. With an acute sense of shame she said:

'You have told me nothing of this woman . . . my model.'

'Carmela? There is nothing to tell you,' he said. 'I was young when I met her. It was before the war. I suppose I was in love with her . . . love of a kind. I'm a man, and I've never pretended to be different from other men in that way. We lived together, and we parted. She left me.'

Tears that she could not control started in Maddalena's eyes. 'It was true then,' she whispered. 'And now?'

'Now? I don't know what you mean.'

She flushed. At that moment she was less mistress of herself than at any other in their interview. She was conscious of this; felt that her anxiety degraded her; and yet she could not be satisfied without an answer.

'Now . . . in Pergusa . . . since you have been here . . . She stopped, for shame.

'You want to know if we have renewed our relations?'

'Yes . . . I know it is hateful . . . I mean that.'

'The truth is this. I saw her for the first time when we met at your studio door.'

She flushed with embarrassment at his clumsiness. Must she be forced to demean herself further?

'You haven't answered my question,' she compelled herself to say.

Then her meaning dawned on him. 'Good God!' he cried. 'Did you even imagine it? You know that I love you.'

The passion in his voice humbled her. 'I'm sorry,' she said. 'Forgive me!' But she could not leave it at that. 'And since you've met her again you haven't seen much of her?'

He flushed with suspicion and answered her harshly. He felt that he had a right to be indignant.

'What did she tell you?'

The anger against Carmela that her words had reawakened in his eyes frightened her, but she held on obstinately.

'Nothing . . . about the present.'

'Then I will tell you,' he said, in the same hardened voice. 'After I met her at your door I waited for her in the street. I saw trouble ahead. We lunched together, and then I went back to her room with her. I had a hell of a time. I was deceiving two women at once, and that's a hard job when you love one of them.'

She clutched eagerly at the words; she scarcely knew what she was saying: 'You did not love her at all?' And then, descending in spite of herself to the bathetic: 'You did not kiss her?' Her face flamed with confusion at her own words. He stared at her, amazed.

'Yes, I kissed her. I had to kiss her. Why do you ask that?'

But her childish question had answered itself. She hid her burning cheeks and the tears that brimmed in her eyes, but he knew that there could be only one reason for this intense and detailed curiosity about his relations with Carmela. She was jealous. And how,

conceivably, could she be jealous unless she still loved him. The surprise of her revelation took him by the throat. He lost himself.

'Maddalena . . . My God!' he cried hoarsely. 'I can't believe it. Oh, my love, my love . . .'

But she shrank away from him, feebly protesting: 'Don't . . . oh, don't!' while the tears that had stood in her eyes overmastered her. Bryden could do nothing, for he felt that she was too broken to resist his comforting and he could not hold her in his arms unless she willed it. He stood over her helplessly, his own body shaken by her tears. Slowly she recovered herself and rose from the seat by the bureau into which she had collapsed. Her face was flushed; her lips still trembled; in her hand she held the crumpled pages of his report. 'I must go,' she whispered tearfully. His heart bled for her; he knew that he must use her with tenderness; and yet he could not let her go without giving him any intimation of his fate. He followed her to the door.

'Maddalena,' he said. 'I too was going . . .'

'Where?'

'Anywhere . . . away from Pergusa. Do you wish me to stay?'

'How can I tell you? I have no wishes.'

'But you believe in me?'

'Yes. I believe in you.'

'And you will remember what I asked you?'

'Yes, I will remember.'

'And perhaps . . . ?'

But she was gone.

The Tenth Chapter

ORDEAL

I

In the darkness of her bedroom she cried till she could cry no more: yet how different were these tears from those of desolation and defeat with which she had harrowed the heart of Bryden! She was happy, and happy with less reservations than she had been before, for her new tears were not the tears of anguish but of relief, no longer a laceration but almost a luxury that she was in no hurry to be done with. Now, once and for all, she had made firm her belief in Bryden's honesty; and though something of the romance of their relation had been sacrificed in the fiery ordeal through which they had both passed, she was convinced that what remained was of a finer quality. She found a dozen reasons to reinforce this conviction, telling herself that if he had been less genuine than she believed, it would have been easy for him to make a case for himself, admitting the superficial facts that weighed against him and leaving the rest unsaid. 'If he had done that,' she thought, 'I could have met him more easily. I should have been like ice. I might even have had the courage to test him with some question about Carmela, and if he had lied to me then I should not have been hurt. Nothing could have hurt me. But he gave me no chance of testing him in that way. He told me everything, and I believe him.'

Her emotion ran into a new channel, for now that she had acquitted Bryden of his greater offence it was natural that she should think compassionately of what he had suffered not only during the later period of estrangement and suspicion, but during all those earlier days when his difficulties had been unknown to her:

and so, remembering his drawn and haggard face, his tortured eyes, his breaking voice, she began to accuse herself of having harshly left him to sufferings that a single word from her might have relieved.

'But if I had spoken,' she told herself, 'I should certainly have broken down and made him suffer more than ever.' So, tenderly embellishing the image of Bryden which doubt and humiliation had once defaced, she found herself settling into a confidence so serene that she forgot the fact that in the eyes of others he still lay under a terrible and a justifiable suspicion. She realised slowly that her own task was no more than begun. She had fulfilled her promise of investigating the truth of Carmela's accusation more fully than she had hoped. It now remained for her to communicate what she had found to those who were likely to accept the blackest of Bryden's self-accusations, but to regard his conversion as a cynical attempt to escape the wages of his misdoing. They would laugh at this death-bed repentance. A death-bed repentance! That was what it would mean. Men who carried their lives in their hands could not take risks; and if Bryden's confession, or the torn papers that her unconscious fingers still clutched, were made known to Carlo or Vaccari, her lover could not count on more than a few hours of life.

In an instant the existence of these damning pages appeared to her in such a terrible light that she made haste to burn them, crumpling the ashes in her fingers and scattering them on the night air. Yet, even when she had performed this act of treachery, her conscience compelled her to admit that unless she reported what she had discovered her life would not be worth living. And, if she did what her conscience and the voice of tradition bade her, the life of Bryden would be sacrificed by her words.

Never, in all her life, had she felt more solitary or friendless. Her imagination began to play with the consequences to which her duty committed her inevitably—for her new pride in Bryden refused to admit that he could consent to her keeping silence—she imagined how Carlo would feel if once he knew, as know he must, and a sudden preoccupation for Bryden's

safety sent her breathless to the door of her room, half determined to visit his studio once more and beg him, if he loved her, to vanish into the hills as he had wished to do. 'But even if I begged him,' she told herself, 'he would not go. He has shown me his courage in a difficult thing, and it is not for me to show him a way that is easy and cowardly. And, above all this,' she thought, 'he is staying for my sake. Perhaps he has some foreboding that things will go ill with us, and a hope that he may be able to protect me.'

This would not be the first time, she mused, that Bryden had risked his life in her company. So, in the corridor, she hesitated, judging him—and rightly—by her own romantic standard. Always, in her mind, these strange mediæval ideals of atonement and the performance of vows kept company with the impulsive candour of her nature. She abandoned the idea of warning him. 'He would only smile at me and refuse,' she said. 'He has lived through too much to set a high value on security, and now that he knows that I believe in him nothing could induce him to leave me. There must be some other way.'

All through the night she tormented her brain in endeavours to find it, longing, above all things, for the help of one fellow-creature in whom she might confide. There was none. Carlo, to begin with, was out of the question; his bitter words of the day before had given her a taste of the kind of sympathy she might expect in that quarter. Vaccari, too . . . for though she had seen little of him she knew that he was playing the most dangerous game of all of them and could afford to take no risk: a dark and violent man, with whom assassination was the servant of fear, and, what was more, a man of another class whose standards of conduct were foreign to her and therefore distrusted. Her mother . . . how useless in such an emergency! She might as well confide in Carolina! The Duke? Even with him the risk of a full confession was so great that she hardly dared to face it. For him a belief in Bryden involved not only his life but the crown of Trinacria and the future of his dynasty. Yet, in spite of this, the conviction grew in her that the Duke was her only

hope (by this time she was beginning to identify herself with Bryden's fortunes) and against her fears she summoned to her aid the picture of royal benignance and clemency with which her passionate loyalty had already invested this unimpressive figure. More than this, she knew, by the memory of a hundred small attentions, that the Duke was kindly disposed toward herself, and that the story of her dilemma might appeal to him on personal grounds. A fervent belief in his generosity grew as she considered it, and by morning she had determined to take the risk of telling him.

Morning came, but every moment the performance of her plan seemed more difficult. Every day, as the culmination of the royalist plot grew nearer, the Duke became less accessible. Before dawn, on that morning, Vaccari had entered the house through Carolina's kitchen, and while the others breakfasted, he was busy talking in the Duke's bedroom, telling him of the development of the plans for Massa's assassination; the arrangements for the day of the Assembly's opening, on which, it was hoped, the restoration might be proclaimed; the thousand covert ways in which popular expectation was being surely but indefinitely aroused, and the desperate hope that these emotions might rise into a wave of monarchical feeling, one of those sudden reversals of sentiment to which a Latin crowd is peculiarly subject.

They waited for him anxiously, hearing not even the least rumour of voices. Every one of them was now beginning to show signs of tension. With Maddalena and Carlo this might easily be understood, but even the placid features of their mother had grown gray and anxious. Carlo, a little irritated by his exclusion from the Duke's interview with Vaccari, forgetting the Deputy's importance in his scorn of the man's plebeian origin, sat glooming over his coffee, apparently unconscious of either of them, listening jealously for the least sound to tell him that the audience was over. His moodiness imposed silence on the others, and the old woman glanced nervously from his face to that of Maddalena, as though she feared that her tongue might give slip to some commonplace that would offend them

both and scarcely dared to swallow her coffee for fear of disturbing them. Her mild eyes were troubled, not by the imminence of a desperate *coup d'état*, but by the fact that her children were distressed and that the deputy's breakfast was going cold.

At last Vaccari emerged, swart, unshaven, looking rougher than usual in the workman's clothes that he had put on by way of a disguise. The mother, with a sigh of relief, poured out his coffee. Carlo assailed him with a fire of eager questions. He answered shortly, between his gulps, and Maddalena heard for the first time the details of the new attempt on Massa.

The Dictator, so it seemed, was actually playing into their hands, abandoning, for the first time since his accession to power, the secrecy with which his movements had been hidden. 'After all,' Vaccari insisted, 'he could not go on hiding himself for ever: to continue doing so would be in itself a confession of fear.' No doubt he was hoping that the establishment of a constituent assembly would place him in a favourable light, and that the pomp of a military procession with bands playing and banners flying would whip the Pergusans into their usual easy enthusiasms. Half-way between San Constanzo and the Chamber of Deputies the procession was to halt before the steps of the University for the presentation of an address from each of the faculties, and there, unless the plans miscarried, would be the end of his triumphal progress. 'After that,' said Vaccari, with a wide gesture, 'we trust to luck. God knows what the harvest will be; but at least the seed has been well and widely sown.'

Maddalena listened to his words without a flicker of answering emotion. It seemed to her as though these things that made her mother draw her breath sharply and sent the blood to Carlo's head had no relation to herself. Only she was conscious of Vaccari's dark eyes and his big unshaven jowl: the face that seemed to symbolise for her the cruelty of the forces with which she must fight for Bryden's life. From time to time in his narration the eyes of Vaccari met hers, and her heart died within her, for she felt that they threatened her. She had not long to wait for something more

definite; for when the deputy had licked the remains of his coffee from his moustache, he turned on her abruptly and asked her what she had learned of Bryden. 'I suppose you have seen him?' he said. She felt that he expected her to answer 'No.'

'Yes. I have seen him,' she said.

'Good!' His eyes challenged her scornfully. 'Well, and what then?'

She grew suddenly frightened of Vaccari's eyes. Never in another human being had she been so conscious of potential harm. She felt an urgent need to protect herself; repented of the opening she had given him. If only she had had the courage to lie to him! Now, at least, she need have no scruples, for she was fighting for everything of value that she possessed. But Carlo did not give her time to collect her thoughts.

'When did you see him?' he pressed her. And the question came so quickly that she was startled into answering him truly. 'Last night.'

'Last night?' Vaccari echoed with a laugh that sent the blood tingling into her finger-tips with indignation. She burned that this lout should insult her while her own brother stood by and acquiesced; yet danger taught her wisdom and she kept her head. It seemed to her that a little of the truth might serve her better than any lie, and so, unhurried by Vaccari's rapid questions, she told them how she had gone by night to Bryden's studio and searched the room for evidences of his guilt.

'Finding nothing,' Vaccari interrupted.

'Nothing,' she lied, and in that moment became acutely conscious of the presence of Carlo's signet-ring on the first finger of her left hand. Like some deceitful schoolgirl she hid the hand behind her back.

'Nothing, of course,' said Vaccari. 'Is it to be imagined that a skilled political agent would leave traces of his work in an unlocked bureau? Even if you had found papers, the odds are that they would have been left there with the idea of misleading. Then he returned, and you spoke w th him?'

'Yes, I spoke with him. If you will not interrupt me I can tell you better.' She hesitated, fighting for time

in which to think, knowing that with one false step she might ruin everything, wondering how much of the truth might seem more plausible than the most skilful lie, convinced by the cynical mistrust of Vaccari's eyes that whatever she might say she would not be believed. Panic seized her and robbed her of the power to think what she was saying. She dared not speak another word, but stood before them spellbound, feeling that her silence must have confessed to them already the guilt of which she was conscious. Vaccari took her by the arm and shook her roughly. 'Speak!' he said, 'and do not think that we can't see when you are lying.'

'I can't,' she whispered. 'I can't . . .'

Vaccari's hand tightened on her arm; his fingers dug into her flesh so that she gave a little gasp of pain. Carlo was speaking to her: 'Maddalena . . . good God! . . . are you mad?' But if they had held a revolver to her head she could not have spoken, for, in this culmination of her four days' agony she had neither will nor interest in life, being only conscious of the painful grip of Vaccari's fingers and the indefinite figure of her mother standing before her with clenched hands and tears streaming down the powdered wrinkles of her face. She was not even moved when, in an aura of pomatum, the urbane figure of the Duke entered the room and stood in amazement before this uncomfortable emotional scene.

'What's this, what's this?' he asked quickly. 'Vaccari . . . Carlo . . . what's the matter?'

Vaccari relaxed his grip on Maddalena's arm. 'The painter, Bryden . . . she has seen him. She won't speak. I don't like the look of it.'

The Duke put his hand on Vaccari's shoulder. 'Leave her to me,' he said. 'You're too rough, Vaccari. With a woman tact is necessary.'

Vaccari left her, shrugging his shoulders. 'It's fatal that women should be mixed up at all in an affair of this kind.'

The Duke took her hand and patted it. It was merely the gesture of a benevolent old gentleman, but to Maddalena the action seemed curiously poignant, restoring her faculty of thought and filling her with an eager confidence in his kindness that would have been

pitiable had it not sprung from an ancient and ideal devotion. 'Now, come along! Tell me all about it!' he asked her gently.

And with courage renewed she told him, not, indeed, of the terrible documents that she had destroyed, but of her interview with Bryden himself, of his old friendship with Massa and of his coming to Trinacria; told him of the task that Massa had given him, and his own confession of failure to perform it. 'He was frank with me,' she urged. 'He withheld nothing, even the things that most condemned him. It is impossible not to believe what he said, even if it did not correspond with what the model had already told us. He is not the kind of man who could ever do what Massa asked of him. He is one of us. My mother will tell you that he is the son of one of the Leonfortes, and if you saw him for yourself you could have no doubts.' Vaccari snorted contemptuously, but her enthusiasm would not allow her to heed him. 'He found that the position was intolerable; he began to see for himself that the right was on our side, and on Massa's nothing but blood and cruelty. Massa had asked him for reports on the deputy Vaccari.'

'I knew it,' cried Vaccari. 'You've bungled it. We're too late!'

'But we're not too late. Although he went with me to the deputy's house he has made no report.'

'My God, woman, and you believe *that*?'

'Gently, Vaccari, gently!' sighed the Duke. 'Let her speak!'

'He has reported nothing. On the contrary, he's ready at this moment to place himself at our disposal, to do anything, even the most dangerous task that can be asked of him.'

Vaccari laughed out loud. 'It's the classical rôle of the provocative agent. Too late in the day for that. We know too much.'

'But he knows that we know,' Maddalena persisted eagerly. 'He knows that, with us, he's a spy, self-confessed. He's still in this house; he's in your power. At this moment, if you wished to do it, you could go upstairs and put an end to him . . .'

'As we should have done long ago,' Carlo interrupted passionately.

'But he knew that yesterday. If he had wished to do so he was free to go in absolute safety. And he *hasn't* gone. He's preferred to stay here and face it out. He knows that you can do what you like with him, and he's prepared to abide by your decision. No man who didn't believe in his convictions would dare to do that. All he asks is that he should be allowed to prove himself.'

'A daring game,' said Vaccari. 'It takes some courage to go on bluffing till the last moment. Time it was finished!'

Maddalena turned on him passionately. 'It is no game. I tell you, deputy, that the man is as honest as you are. If you put a revolver into his hand and told him to go to San Constanzo and shoot Massa as he found him he would do it. I'd answer for him with my life!' she flamed at him.

'We may all do that,' Vaccari replied with a laugh.

The Duke put his hand on Maddalena's shoulder, and at his touch her anger subsided. 'You have not told me everything, my child,' he said, half-smiling. 'You've told me of a conversion, and left out the principal reasons not only of the conversion itself but of your defence of it. This man, Bryden, loves you?'

She answered: 'Yes.'

'And you?'

'I love him. For God's sake have pity on me!'

'We've had enough of this,' Vaccari broke in petulantly. 'Now, at least, it's obvious that whatever either of them says is worthless. The man is dangerous, and the sooner the risk is stopped the better.'

Maddalena clung to the Duke, pitifully pleading. Gently he disengaged her hands.

'There is no need for violence, deputy,' he said. 'Even you must admit that if the man Bryden remains in this house, at any rate till the day after to-morrow, he can do no harm. That is not to admit that one believes in his story. I quite agree with you that we cannot use him.'

'You're going to let him slip through our fingers?'

cried Vaccari, beside himself. 'I have had too much of your languid fatalism. That is the truth. I wash my hands of the whole business! If we must have a monarchy, we had better get a man to fill it.'

The Duke's pale forehead flushed, but before he could reply Maddalena had turned on Vaccari in his defence. 'And it is *you* who talk to us of traitors? You, who have risen out of the gutter, and hope to rise higher, dare to threaten the King of Trinacria? You can go this moment to Massa and denounce your friends, but that won't save your head, and you know it! Now we see whom we can trust!'

'There is nothing to be gained by quarrelling,' said the Duke blandly. 'You know as well as I do, Vaccari, that whatever happens we all stand to gain or lose. It's too late to talk as you have done, and the matter of Bryden is a small one. What I propose is that the marchesina should see the man again, and ask him to promise not to leave this house until the day after the meeting of the Assembly. By that time he will be unable either to help us or to hurt us. Either we shall be safe, or else . . .' He opened his arms and let them fall in a gesture that expressed the uncomfortable fact better than words.

By this time Vaccari had recovered his self-control. 'As you wish,' he said. 'But I hope you will remember my protest.'

'Willingly, Vaccari. I have a good memory. As for the promise I spoke of, I've no doubt but that it will be given to this particular envoy. If you wish you can assure yourself of its performance by making the fellow our prisoner. He is not in a position to object to that.'

'I agree,' said Vaccari. 'That will be better.'

'Then we will leave it at that. The marchesina will explain. You will have no difficulty in explaining?' he asked Maddalena.

'No, I will explain,' she replied. The Duke, by this time mildly emotional, turned away from the embarrassing gratitude that he read in her eyes.

'Till to-morrow, then, Vaccari,' he said.

2

Through half the morning Bryden waited impatiently in his studio. He made his own coffee for breakfast as was his custom, and, as he did so, reflected on the extraordinary ease with which his mind seemed to return to the routine which the events of the last week had broken so violently. During the night the last shreds of sirocco cloud had been whirled away; the day dawned brilliant with a sky that lightened his heart with its pellucid clearness and carried him back unconsciously to the time before the storm. It was difficult for his rejuvenated body to realise the spiritual agonies through which he had passed, so splendidly did the shining heavens proclaim the permanence of their perfection, assuring him that all was well. Only for an odd moment was he able to remember that but for the accident that had brought him face to face with Maddalena the night before, this pleasant studio might have been empty and he himself a fugitive begging for food in some remote hill village twenty miles from Pergusa.

For the rest, his thoughts were with Maddalena, filling the indefinite hours in which he waited for her to appear with memories of their last meeting: not of its terrible early stages in which his fate had hung so dangerously balanced, but of their parting and her confession of her belief in his honesty. Those words: 'I believe in you,' sang in his heart more triumphantly than any avowal of love, for he knew that they had been more difficult to say, filling him with a curious exaltation in which, laughing with the risen sun, he felt himself able to face whatever blow a jealous providence might be planning for him. He did not believe for one moment that his troubles were at an end—for in his demand for an opportunity of proving himself he had asked more—but he now believed that whatever the end of his adventure might be he had at least freed himself from the reproach of utter failure that had overwhelmed him as he lay drugged with fatigue and wine in the dex

gardens. Once and for all he had found his justification, and after that nothing else mattered.

He heard a tap at his door and hurried to meet Maddalena, for he knew that it was she. In an instant his eager eyes told him that she too had come through triumphantly, though the face that he loved was haggard and worn with the struggle. Each was aware of the other's happiness though neither could speak. He took her hand and drew her toward him. She turned her face from him; but he knew that her reluctance was of modesty and not of fear.

'I have only come for a moment,' she whispered.

'It is enough for me that you have come at all.'

'To let you know,' she said, 'that I have told them.'

'Everything?'

'Everything. I needn't tell you how difficult it was. For a time I couldn't dare to think what would happen. You have no idea of the danger that you ran in staying.'

'What does it matter? I've been able to see you again. That is all I live for.'

She smiled. Her fingers tightened on his hand so that he was overcome with a desire to take her in his arms. Gently, and, as it seemed to him, reluctantly, she restrained him.

'No, no,' she said. 'You must listen to me. It's only for a moment. You owe your life to the Duke.'

'To you . . . to you! Your splendid courage . . . your loyalty, you wonderful woman! It was you who were generous enough to believe in me.'

She raised her head in dissent. 'No. You are wrong. I could have done nothing. It's he who is generous. Without him you wouldn't be living at this moment.'

'But you know that I'm not ungrateful? All that I ask, as I told you last night, is to redeem myself by some service. It's necessary to me, personally, that I should prove myself. I'm ready for anything.'

'I believe you. You know that I believe you. But you've only to think to see that that is impossible. You know as well as I do that these are critical days. Even if he wished to believe you—and the fact that you are still living shows you that he does—a man in his position could not take risks. In the eyes of the others

you are still a dangerous person. I do not wish to wound you, but is it not a fact that a convert must always be looked at with suspicion? You see? Tell me that you understand?'

'Yes,' he replied. 'I understand.'

'And so you will understand also the decision that they have made. Until the day after to-morrow—God knows what will have happened by then—you will consider yourself a prisoner.'

'Tell them that I have given you my parole. Until they wish it I will not leave this room.'

'I knew that was what you would say; and I, of course, would have accepted it. But, as things are, that would not be enough. They consider it necessary to lock these rooms.' As she spoke he could see that she was ashamed to have spoken these words, that she wondered how he would take them. He recognised her delicacy and loved her for it. He quickly reassured her.

'That's a small thing,' he said, with a smile. 'I shall not be conscious of it; for if I've given you my word I shall not even go near the door.'

'I know,' she murmured. 'And yet I had to tell you.' She stood with downcast eyes, dreamily, with his hand in hers.

'If only I may see you,' he said, 'I shall think of my imprisonment as the luckiest accident. If it's only for a moment, you will let me catch sight of you?'

She started as though her dream had been broken—started almost with fright.

'Don't ask me,' she said quickly. 'I can't promise . . . I can't possibly promise. I've stayed too long already. I must go.'

He saw that she was shrinking from the nearness of his passion. He did not believe that this timidity was the expression of herself; but he had no words in which to tell her so. He held her hand tightly so that she could not go.

'Maddalena,' he whispered, 'my love, do not leave me like this. Can you give me nothing of yourself?'

'Oh, do not ask me,' she begged him. 'How can we speak of that when so much depends on these awful days? If you love me you will ask me nothing . . . nothing. I beg you to let me go!'

Still he restrained her.

'But if there is anything in which I can help you, you will come to me? You'll remember that however you may think of me I am yours . . . wholly and absolutely yours?'

'Yes,' she said. 'I will remember.' She forced herself to escape from the emotion of the moment. 'How many keys are there to this room?'

'Only one. It is in the door. Here it is.' He took it from the keyhole and gave it to her.

'Thank you.' She turned away.

'One moment. There is another. I had forgotten. You left it here last night.'

She took it from him hurriedly to hide her own confusion, opened the door and closed it behind her without a glance that might show her the appeal in his eyes. When she found herself alone in the corridor outside she gave a sigh of relief. Summoning as much of her senses as she could recover she turned the second key gently in the wards. She thanked heaven that a solid door of chestnut concealed her shame from Bryden's eyes, and yet, when she had finished her humiliating business she felt herself overtaken by a wild desire to set eyes on him once more, to give him one word that might express a little of the love with which her heart was filled. For a second she hesitated, then, mastering her emotions, hurried downstairs, trying, all the time, to banish the suffering image of Bryden from her thoughts.

Returning to the studio she handed the two keys without a word to Carlo, who received them with no more than an upward motion of his eyebrows. She could not trust herself to speak to him, but concealed her emotions as quickly as she could in the solitude of her room. There, from the passionate confusion of her thoughts, emerged the conviction that she had been right at all costs to defend herself from the treacherous influence of any words of love. Determinedly she put all thoughts of love behind her, compelling herself to think only of her duty toward the man to whom she owed Bryden's life. If, in the time before, she had been bound to the Duke by ties of loyalty,

now, a thousand times more was she indebted to him, and nothing that it was in her power to avoid must stand between her and the fulfilment of her debt.

The thought of her own impotence in these high matters distressed her. She felt that something heroic was demanded of her, and yet there was nothing heroic that a woman could do. All that she could offer she had already given. There remained nothing but the hard practice of patience, a virtue in which women were supposed by tradition to excel. She became conscious of the feverish ticking of a small travelling clock on her dressing-table. It was nearly noon. In another twenty-four hours the fortunes of the Duke, with which the fates of her love and her life were inextricably blended, would be settled once and for all. In the past, days had passed by her with a bewildering swiftness—it seemed a ridiculously small time since that on which they had been driven from Leonforte leaving the mutilated body of her father behind them—and yet it seemed to her that this most momentous day would never pass. How to live through it as though it were an ordinary period of time? She could not tell. At last, obeying a habit that was so deeply rooted as to take the place of an instinct, she fell on her knees beside her bed, praying to the sorrowful image of the saint who had given her her name for intercession on behalf of her afflicted country, the cause in which she believed, and her strange, tempestuous love.

3

The day of the Constituent Assembly's opening dawned as magnificently as that which had preceded it. To Bryden, impatient in his studio, and Maddalena, haggard from another sleepless night, it seemed, incongruously, little different from any other. The steady hum of Pergusa brought to them nothing of the excitement that thrilled the holiday crowd in the streets. All along the route of the procession houses had been hung with flowers and strings of bunting; but the Street of Palaces was too narrow to hold a crowd of sight-seers, and its gloomy façades of stone remained

undecorated, reflecting, as it seemed, the indifference of centuries toward the political enthusiasms of a day.

Early in the morning before the sun had mounted the eastern escarpment of the Pergusan hills, Maddalena had heard a subdued stir in the rooms next to hers telling her that Carlo and the Duke were preparing to leave the palazzo and take themselves through the empty streets to the place of meeting that Vaccari had appointed. She listened anxiously, but did not move from her sleepless bed, for she knew that her mother was attending them and realised once more how little help another woman might give at the outset of that mysterious journey. Since the moment when she had left him she had not set eyes on Bryden. She had even done her best to banish him from her thoughts; and the task had been less difficult than she had imagined it would be, for arrangements had been made with Carolina, greatly wondering, to keep him supplied with food, and the suspense of waiting for the final messages of Vaccari had absorbed the intelligence of the whole household.

At nine she rose and dressed herself, then joined her mother at the deserted breakfast table. It was a difficult meal, for each of them knew that to have spoken of commonplace things would have been to mock the intensity of their inmost thoughts. In addition to this, ever since the moment when she had confessed her love for Bryden, Maddalena had felt that the older woman regarded her with a bewilderment that suggested that her delicacy had been incurably offended. Of this it seemed idle, and almost impious to speak; so they sat opposite one another sipping their coffee in silence until Maddalena freed herself from the atmosphere of discomfort by returning to her room.

She could not stay there, for by this time the hands of her clock were approaching the hour of ten, and at ten precisely Massa's procession was to leave San Constanzo. She betook herself quietly to a large, empty room on the same floor as Bryden's, from which an iron balcony overlooked the Street of Palaces, its end filled to eastward by the dome of the municipal buildings, from which the red flag fluttered lazily

in the morning breeze. This dome, and the flag that surmounted it, were the centre of her thoughts; for it stood to her, in the high loneliness of that upper room, as the index of the great events that were in preparation. At half-past ten Massa would reach the University, and halt to receive the professorial addresses. Five minutes later Massa would cease to exist, and in place of that arrogant piece of red bunting the tricolour of Trinacria would be broken on the flagstaff, telling all Pergusa that the counter-revolution had begun.

For the present that tyrannous symbol seemed secure enough. She had left her watch below and for this reason found it impossible to gauge the passage of time. An age passed. She knew that it must surely be half-past ten, and yet no sound of cheering or rumour of an excited crowd came westward to tell her that Massa had started on his last journey. A sudden fear assailed her lest at the last moment the plot had been discovered and Massa had abandoned his triumphant progress.

The sound of a cannon shook the air. At first she wondered if she had been deceived in her estimate of the time, if this were the explosion of the bomb in the University square; but the boom of the first gun was followed by others in regular succession, and she knew, with a shaking heart, that this must be the salute with which the cannon at San Constanzo were signalling the departure of the Dictator.

Half an hour more to wait . . . Her mother had stolen into the room, so softly that she had not heard her come. She spoke, and a cry of alarm came to Maddalena's lips.

'Mother, how you startled me!'

'I'm sorry, my child. I heard the firing and wondered if anything were to be seen. I called you but you didn't answer.'

'No, I didn't hear you. You can see nothing.'

'I think I'll stay with you all the same,' said the old woman, humbly.

'Yes . . . do stay. You didn't bring your watch?'

'Yes, it is here; but I'm afraid it has stopped. How could any one be expected to remember?'

'It doesn't matter. You had better sit down.'

With a tired sigh the old woman sank into a carved gilt chair that stood piled with moth-eaten curtains of damask in a corner full of lumber. Maddalena, hearing her sigh, grew suddenly sorry for her. She remembered all that her mother had suffered, reproached herself with a lack of sympathy that was natural to youth; but the compassionate thought was only momentary. There, over the crowded roofs, a mile away, the royal coach was moving slowly towards the square of the University. She had seen it in her life once before, when the king had driven in state to an opening of the Chamber of Deputies. She remembered the high stepping of the white horses, the shining cuirasses of the guards, and in the gilt coach itself the figure of that hardy, fierce-moustached little man whom she had been taught to revere as the chosen of God, the man whom Massa's servants had butchered out at sea. And in his place she imagined Massa, Massa whom she had never seen in the flesh but whose face she had known and hated from the pictures in the newspapers; Massa, Bryden's friend.

A faint sound of cheering came toward her over the roofs. Perhaps it was a cheer, perhaps it was a cry of hatred. She could not tell. She only knew that this faint sound which distance converted into a falsetto was the expression of a crowd's mysterious emotions. It must be nearly half-past ten. Those high-stepping horses and that gilt chariot must be drawing near to their destruction. Her eyes returned eagerly every minute to the red flag that still fluttered lazily from the dome.

She strained her ears, but could catch no further human sound. The Street of Palaces was still as silent as a tomb. Only, as she looked westward, she saw that other figures had appeared in silence on all the balconies of those degraded mansions; figures of women of the lower classes who had been dragged from their housework by an anxiety not to miss what was happening. They stole out quietly, imperceptibly, as a crowd sifts into the galleries of a theatre. And what did any one of them care whether Massa lived or died? All that they knew was that a *festa* had been proclaimed, that their men would bring home no wages in the evening,

yet expect their stomachs to be filled. And as Maddalena looked at them she realised for the first time the vast political inertness of Pergusa, the thousands crowding on thousands who cared nothing for the causes for which others risked their lives, and a huge hopelessness weighed upon her that the fate of Trinacria should rest in the hands of such a fickle multitude as the Trinacrians.

Suddenly the high murmur of what she now knew to be cheering increased. The head of the procession had reached the square of the University, a point from which waves of sound could travel to her balcony without obstruction. She held her breath. She could not stay any longer at the window doing nothing, watching. She stepped back into the room. There was her mother still sitting placidly in the carved chair, beating out an irritating rhythm upon the arm of it with her fingers. She smiled wanly as Maddalena faced her. Then, suddenly, she gave a jump and put her hands to her ears. What had startled her was the thud of a loud detonation that shook the walls of the house.

Maddalena felt herself go white. 'It's over,' she gasped. 'It's over!' Her mother did not answer. She just dropped down on the floor beside her chair and began to patter through a Latin prayer. The colour returned to Maddalena's face; she felt the blood beating back into her brain. A feeling of wild elation throbbed in her heart. She ran back to the window. Now every balcony was full of women who chattered like starlings and craned their heads toward the end of the street from which the sound of the explosion had come. But Maddalena scarcely saw them. Her eyes were fixed on the dome of the *municipio* and its arrogant flag, waiting for the ancient tricolour to be broken there. A minute passed. Another. It seemed as if nothing were going to happen. But she had heard and indeed felt the heaviness of the detonation. Saving a miracle Massa could not have lived. It was impossible, impossible, she told herself, that he should be alive.

An awful silence had followed the explosion; but, as she waited, its place was slowly filled by an increasing volume of cheers. This time there was no mistaking

the sound, and her heart told her that the impossible had happened. Massa had escaped the death that had been planned for him. She knew it, with an increasing certainty; and she knew also what was the meaning of those cheers; that the failure of an attempt on this man, who had taken his life in his hands and risked it in their streets, had tickled the emotions of the Pergusa people, making them forget their many months of wrong in their enthusiasm for the Dictator's luck.

In a few minutes her last doubts were removed. Not only was the cheering louder, but also it was spreading definitely, rapidly, in her direction. There could now be no mistaking what had happened. Massa, true to his reputation for personal courage, had resumed his progress toward the chamber. In a little while, a few minutes at the most, the procession, escorted by its cheering crowd, would enter the Street of Palaces. Under that very window she would see the face of Massa, borne onward in triumph. She knew what that meant. She saw the Duke, Carlo, Vaccari, all of them hunted down, arrested, their lives thrown to satisfy the lust of that vile crowd, and it seemed to her that she only stood between them and this ignoble fate. Perhaps there was still something that a woman could do. From the flagstaff on the *municipio* the flag still taunted her.

She crossed the room rapidly. Her mother, cut short in the middle of one of her muttered prayers, cried out to her, asking her where she was going, but she did not answer. Hurriedly she sought for the key of Bryden's room. She opened his door and stood before him. Her flushed face, her trembling hands, the madness of exaltation in her eyes alarmed him.

'What's the matter?' he cried. 'Maddalena . . . tell me!'

She did not answer his question. 'A revolver . . .' she said, 'I know you have one. Give it to me quickly!'

He stared at her, still shaken by her appearance and the strangeness of her request. He tried to soothe her, but her mind did not seem able to understand him.

'There's no time,' she cried. 'Oh, there's no time. Be quick!'

Now, frightened more than ever, he pressed her to tell him what she meant by her strange request.

'Don't ask me,' she pleaded, with tears in her eyes. 'Give it to me! Give it to me!'

He shook his head. 'Not until you have told me.'

She saw that she could not move him, and burst into a hurried confession of what she intended. Massa had escaped the bomb that should have killed him. On Massa's death depended not only the success of the counter-revolution but the lives of all of them. Somehow or other he must be stopped on his way to the Chamber of Deputies; and there was only one way in which to do this, to shoot him as he passed before their door. It was a matter of minutes—almost of seconds. She clung to him, entreating, and as she did so the full enormity of her intentions chilled him. Again he tried to divert her, caressing; but she would have none of his caresses. He tried with reasoning to show her the madness of her plan.

'Have you ever used a revolver in your life?'

'No. But that is nothing. You must give it to me.'

'If you are not a practised shot you haven't the least chance of doing what you wish. You might kill some poor devil of a spectator, and throw away your own life, but that is all you can do.'

She would not listen to him; and when he still hardened himself against her entreaties, she suddenly flung at him, in a voice that he scarcely knew for hers: 'I know what it is. You are protecting your friend.'

For a second he did not tumble to her meaning. 'What friend? I have no friend.'

'Massa.'

'It isn't true, and you know it isn't true,' he cried. 'I'm protecting the woman I love from the results of her own madness.'

'If you don't give it to me I shall find some other way,' she gasped. He remembered the dagger that he had once seen in her hands.

He stood between her and the door. 'You're mistaken. I shan't let you go.'

She flushed again, with anger. 'What? And you say you love me?'

'You know it.'

'Do you wish me to hate you for ever? You make me disbelieve in your love. I don't want that kind of love.' She came close to him, so near that he felt the warmth of her flushed face. 'Do you really love me?'

'Maddalena . . . good God! . . . how can you ask me?'

'Then, if you are determined not to let me have my own way, prove it by taking my place!'

'Maddalena . . . are you mad?' She felt him tremble.

'You have begged me to let you prove your sincerity. And this is what I ask of you . . . Massa's life.'

He was silent. In that moment he remembered the Massa whom he had loved as a brother, the eager, ardent spirit with which he had communed in Rufo's restaurant. The horrors of Pergusa were forgotten. He saw nothing but the eyes of his friend. And then the eyes of Maddalena.

'Quick,' she said. 'You have no time to think. Even now they may be coming. Listen!'

He turned away from her and took his revolver from the drawer in Messiter's bureau. She followed him, placing her hand on his shoulder as he bent over the desk.

'You are a good shot?' she whispered. 'You have been a soldier: you are not likely to miss?'

'No, I'm not likely to miss.'

'But quickly! You must slip downstairs and out through Carolina's door. If only you are in time!'

He saw that the clip of his automatic was full and slipped it in his pocket. She put her arms round his neck.

'My love,' she whispered, 'my dearest!'

He folded her in his arms and for a moment they clung together in a most terrible kiss. Then Bryden, not daring to look at her, turned away from her and passed from the room. She watched him go, and when he had passed out of her sight stood trembling, distraught. She would have prayed; but even the most familiar words would not form themselves in her brain, for, as she summoned them, they were broken by the sound of a multitude of people pouring into the narrow neck of the Street of Palaces, the roar of the people of

Pergusa escorting their new hero to the throne that he had built upon their sorrows. They were coming nearer . . . nearer. By this time, surely, the head of the procession had passed the gates. She felt that she could not live much longer: that the thread of her life was tense to breaking point. A shot rang out: the sharp bark of an automatic pistol. It was as though the bullet had entered her own heart. Her head swam. Her knees bent beneath her. She fell to the floor of the studio, and lay there, knowing nothing, save that in her brain the noise of the crowd was beating, seething, breaking, like an angry sea.

How long she lay there motionless and without life she did not know. Only, at last, a sound of many voices aroused her, a sound of lowered voices and the footsteps of men dragging up the marble stairs. And then the voice of Carolina, shrill and breathless. 'This is the room . . . yes, *madonna mia*, and it's unlocked. What a disaster!' As she hurried into the room the old woman caught sight of Maddalena's prostrate body and gave a cry of alarm. In a moment she had knelt beside her and was covering her hands with kisses. 'Ah, my darling, what has happened to you? And what brings you here? Put your hands to your eyes, my sweetest, and do not look. It is a bad augury if you should see.'

Maddalena clutched weakly at her hand. 'Carolina . . . tell me . . . what is it?'

'A terrible thing. He was standing in the street. Why, the minute before he had passed me at my own kitchen door! And then, as the Dictator's carriage passes, he shoots himself . . . right through the heart. Pray for his soul, my child, but do not look! Quick, cover your eyes. *Madonna mia* they are here already!'

Four men came staggering into the room, panting beneath the weight of a heavy burden.

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